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Richard Šeda

Improvised Music

South Pole

Rudolfine Prague Composers

3rd
biennial

New Opera Days Ostrava



GYÖRGY LIGETI: *Aventures and Nouvelles Aventures* (1962/65)

PETR KOTÍK: *William William* (2016) premiere

IDIN S. MOFAKHAM / MARTYNA KOSECKA: *At the Waters of Lethe* (2015/16) premiere

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Antonín Dvořák Theatre / Jiří Myron Theatre / former coal mine Hlubina / Cooltour cultural centre

June 27–30, 2016

Dear readers,

_____ If you happen to read Czech Music Quarterly on a regular basis, you will know that the vast majority of its texts are dedicated to art music, either historical or contemporary. The reasons for this orientation are mainly practical – notwithstanding its all-embracing name, the magazine simply has to choose which segments of music to attend to, as, by and large, we are just not able to encompass everything, not that we tend to underestimate other spheres of music. Nonetheless, from time to time we do publish articles dealing with music other than the composed, be they devoted to folk, non-mainstream jazz or, as in the case of the text in this issue, improvised music. Similarly to progressive jazz – and even more so – it is precisely the non-jazz-related improvised music (also referred to as non-idiomatic improvisation) scene that to a significant degree shares an audience with the contemporary art music scene, at least the one that does not arch its neck gazing back at the past. The overview written by the music journalist and musician-insider Petr Ferenc was included in the magazine to mark the occasion of the Vs. Interpretation festival, which will take place in Prague at the end of April and the beginning of May. The covermount supplement to this issue is another CD from the Composer Portraits series, this time featuring Michal Nejtěk – a creator in the case of whom composed music constitutes just a part of the activities defining his artistic identity.

Have a nice spring
Petr Bakla

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RICHARD ŠEDA

FROM AUTODIDACT

TO CORNETTO MASTER

The cornetto player Richard Šeda lives in South Bohemia, far away from the major musical centres. Only once, so as to study at a conservatory, has he strayed from his native town of Dačice. Afterwards, he began teaching at the local music school. The still waters, however, were markedly rippled by his steadfast interest in early music. A fascination with the cornetto drove him, initially a trumpeter, to relentless studies of this instrument and has ultimately turned him into an absolute master. At the present time, the name of Richard Šeda appears in numerous concert programmes across Europe, yet concurrently remains connected with “his” Dačice.

What was your journey from the trumpet to the cornetto, and to early music in general, like?

The journey started back during the time of my studies at the České Budějovice Conservatory, where Baroque music was frequently played, albeit on modern instruments. I cannot remember when the very first impulse emerged, yet it probably began with searching for recordings of Baroque music performed on copies of early instruments. At first listen, I was intrigued by the sound of the natural trumpet, its typical, slightly husky sound. Then I felt a strong desire to acquire one, but I did not have the contacts that would have made it possible to procure the instrument.

After graduating from the conservatory, I began taking private recorder lessons, which at least to a certain degree satisfied my desire to play early music. Yet the fateful turning point occurred in 1998 or so, when I came across a recording



PHOTO: JAN KLIMES

of *The Czech Lute*, a cycle of 13 songs by the Czech Baroque composer Adam Michna of Otradovice, performed by the Ritornello ensemble. That is when I first heard the sound of the cornetto, and I was eager to try it out. So I got in contact with Ritornello's artistic director, Michael Pospíšil, through a printed music directory – at the time, precious few were connected to the internet – who gladly invited me to his home. I set out to see him in Prague, convinced that I would immediately be able to play the crooked rod and find how simple it was. Yet the very opposite was the case. The problem rested in the unnatural spacing between the cornetto's holes. I returned home bewildered and disappointed that not even this wind instrument, although with a mouthpiece, was the right one for me. Then it dawned on me that unless I got to possess my own cornetto I would never make out how to play it. Following about two years of my playing a relatively poor instrument, with an even worse mouthpiece, my feeling hadn't improved much, yet, nevertheless, I was at least capable of playing a few simple songs.

What was the most difficult thing about playing the cornetto at the beginning?

Two things in particular. A very uncomfortable span of the fingers, which for a year or so caused me pain in the hands; and the correct breathing into the instrument. In a way, the cornetto is similar to the human voice and requires an approach different from that to the trumpet, to which I had been used for years. I also had to resolve the problem with the relatively small mouthpiece. For years, I played a model that was designed for former trumpeters, which was not ideal. Over the course of time, I gradually began to use smaller and smaller mouthpieces, as it was not possible to play a small one from the outset.

Mouthpieces are a topic in itself. Could you specify what exactly it entailed to move from the trumpet to the cornetto and what types of mouthpiece are used for the cornetto?

Compared to that for the trumpet, the cornetto mouthpiece is much smaller, with its inner diameter ranging between approximately 12.5 and 14.5 mm, and the area against which the lips lean is sharp, similar to an acorn cap. They are made of hard wood or horn, the material in the case of my mouthpiece. Individual cornetto players use mouthpieces of various sizes, depending on the structure of their lips. I personally am of the opinion that a suitable mouthpiece is more important than the instrument itself.

You actually began as an autodidact, yet judging by your accomplishments I assume that you ultimately found an excellent teacher.

I obtained my initial training from Michael Pospíšil, and before long I started to perform with his ensemble. A great benefit for me was his summer workshops, at which we played for a whole week from a facsimile of the 17th-century *Capella Regia Musicalis* hymn book by the Czech Baroque composer and organist Václav Karel Holan Rovenský. Michael also taught us how, by means of toothpicks and ink, to create a stave and transcribe songs in our own hand, as we were not allowed to make copies. I will never forget this experience! Perhaps this is precisely why I still have a deep affinity to Baroque hymn-book songs. Furthermore, I was inspired by the Brno-based cornetto player Radovan Vašina and Štefan Sukup from Prague, whom I envied for their ability to play the cornetto and aspired to catch up with them. And, of course, I procured recordings made by globally renowned players and sought to imitate them, which was actually the only way for me to study the cornetto in my country. To this day, unlike in Western Europe, it is not possible to study the cornetto within an institution in the Czech Republic. In 2004, I first encountered a professional cornetto player, at the Summer School of Early Music in Rajnochovice. It was a really big deal for me, yet the true watershed of my musical life was a workshop in Prague led by the French cornetto player Judith Pacquier, who shortly after the course invited me to participate in her projects, so as to, as she said, improve my musical expression. I even joined her ensemble, Les Traversées Baroques, with whom I have recorded several CDs. A strange period began, one during which I performed more frequently abroad than at home. This opened for me the world of the finest musicians, whose names I had previously only known from recordings.

What is it that makes the cornetto so attractive for you?

The cornetto is wonderful owing to its being an instrument of plenty of colours, possessing a great expressive potential. Now and then, following a concert, the audience surprise me by saying which colour from among the contemporary instruments the sound of the cornetto evoked in them. I above all like the cornetto because I can play the music that was written for it centuries ago and pass it on to other people. I also really enjoy overcoming the difficulties pertaining to playing the cornetto and the opportunity to hone my technique unceasingly.

What key skills must a cornetto player possess?

Perhaps the most essential is the embouchure. When it comes to the fingering technique, those players who have passed over to the cornetto from a woodwind

instrument do have an advantage. Very important too is the inner ear, which helps in negotiating the instrument's intonation impurities, as in the case of singing.

What types of instruments are you currently playing?

I play cornetto copies, made according to preserved models dating from the end of the 16th and the early 17th centuries. For the most part, today's manufacturers do not copy the instruments absolutely precisely, somewhat accommodating them to the needs of contemporary players. This particularly applies to modification of the ventages, which also commonly differs as regards the original instruments. They model after, for instance, Italian cornetto designs from the end of the 16th century, or adhere to Marin Mersenne's 1636 preserved manual. Moreover, modern-time copies are usually tuned at 440 Hz, with the aim to make an ensemble performance easier. No instrument in this tuning has actually been preserved, with the majority of the original models being tuned at a higher frequency. I play three cornetto copies: the cornetto curvo, the most common cornetto, tuned in G, slightly curved and leather covered; then the cornettino diritto, a straight soprano cornetto in C, the smallest in the cornetto family; and the silent cornetto, a straight instrument in G, which, unlike the former two, has a mouthpiece directly built into the instrument.

What is the silent cornetto?

I don't know how it acquired its name; perhaps it is owing to its sound being softer, or the fact that the mouthpiece is directly in the instrument. This type of cornetto was used for the deeper parts.

Where was the cornetto played in its time?

Simply said, in churches, taverns... At one time, mainly from the second half of the 16th century until the early 17th, the cornetto was a very fashionable instrument. It served to double the vocal line, or played it itself, in some cases with only a single soloist. Due to its festive sound, the cornetto occupied a prominent position in sacred music, and it was also applied so as to sonically embellish a secular ceremony. A splendid example of its dual use is the music of Claudio Monteverdi, who employed the cornetto both in the *Marian Vespers*, with the aim to emphasise the spiritual content, and in the opera *L'Orfeo*, in which the instrument symbolises the Underworld. It would seem that the cornetto lives on two absolutely contradictory planes. According to some hypotheses, the cornetto's black colour and its curved "serpentine" shape have a religious background. In the Middle Ages, cornettos used to be straight, and we still don't know why they started to be crooked. Maybe the cornetto players, who enjoyed great respect, wanted somehow more distinctly to single themselves out from the musicians playing straight wind instruments.

And your hypothesis?

I think that the reason was entirely practical: the curved cornetto is easier to hold, it does not slip and affords greater stability. But who knows...

In addition to participating in numerous projects, you have founded your own ensemble...



PHOTO: PETR FRANČAN

Yes, I longed to have my own ensemble, which would systematically perform music for the cornetto in combination with other instruments. Therefore, in 2007, I formed Capella Ornamentata, whose repertoire is predominantly made up of Renaissance and early-Baroque pieces. At the present time, we mainly play in the wind configuration of cornettos, trombones and a dulcian. Of late, we have also frequently collaborated with the Renaissance polyphony Cappella Mariana vocal ensemble, headed by Vojtěch Semerád. We have recorded together the album Praga Magna, featuring late 16th-century Rudolfine Prague music, with its core being the *Missa Confitebor tibi Domine* for eight voices, by the Kapellmeister Philippe de Monte, the last of the great masters of Franco-Flemish polyphony. This spring, my ensemble will be releasing our debut CD, *Da pacem Domine*, bearing the secondary title “Music in Pre-White Mountain Bohemia Across the Denominations”. The bulk of the pieces on the disc, almost exclusively hailing from Bohemian sources, are performed on wind instruments, yet, in line with the period practice, the cantus firmus is provided by the vocals. I would like to add that we made the recording with a reconstructed historical organ in the original 465 Hz tuning, which was typical of the cornettos in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Do you - besides playing the cornetto - also explore archives, compile scores and the like, or do you work with musicologists who prepare your concert materials?

I do everything myself. Transcribing music by means of computer programs is easy, yet as regards its results I initially made mistakes. Owing to my concert experience and rehearsing pieces from scores put together from the preserved parts, I detected some of the errors on my own, others with the assistance of my colleagues. Today, I can say that if you regularly deal with a single stylistic era, putting together scores becomes a routine, and I even find it relaxing.

Are there any music sources employing the cornetto preserved in the Czech Republic?

No solo music for the cornetto has been found here. In his *Saint Wenceslas Mass*, Adam Michna of Otradovice prescribed cornettini, but he must have applied cornettos in other pieces of his. As I have said, cornettos were used for doubling the vocal line, which was determined by the practice and was not written in the notation. Then there is the Music Archive at the Kroměříž Chateau, which contains pieces by 17th- and 18th-century composers who counted with the cornetto. For instance, Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber, who worked as first violin of the local orchestra, and the Viennese court musician Johann Heinrich Schmelzer.

Since 2000, your native town of Dačice has hosted the Dačice Baroque Days. You were one of the festival's initiators, and you have also prepared its programmes. What is the main purpose of the project?

Our festival came into being with the aim to present Baroque music and literature in a manner that would engage the local culture institutions: the museum, library, chateau – Renaissance, by the way – and the Dačice music school. Later on, we added concerts given by professional Czech and – on two occasions – foreign ensembles. Last year, the Dačice Chateau castellan and I included in the programme a Baroque fair with music, dance and traditional handicrafts, which has met with a great response on the part of those visitors who do not usually attend the other events of the festival.

The festival also encompasses a regular Sunday divine service with a special music accompaniment. Why?

One of the reasons why we included the divine service in the festival programme is that masses in particular always played a significant role in the life of the people during the Baroque era. As I have learned, this divine service has also been attended by people from quite distant neighbourhoods who do not regularly come to our church, which makes me happy. The divine service has always been joined by the guests who perform at other festival events.

In 2013, Dačice was celebrating its 830th anniversary. On that occasion, you included in the programme music from the "Dačice Gradual". Could you tell me more about this historical relic?

The Dačice Gradual is an illuminated hymn book of the Dačice literary brotherhood, dating from 1586–87 and comprising 500 sheets with Czech notated liturgical songs. In musical terms, the Gradual is nowise unique, as it contains the ordinary Renaissance repertoire, yet it possesses an immense historical value for our town, since it documents its ample 16th-century artistic production. The tradition of literary brotherhoods was widely spread in the 15th and 16th centuries in particular. It is estimated that at the time about 100 brotherhoods operated in Bohemia and 55 in Moravia. They were essentially religious societies, associating the inhabitants (men and women alike) of individual towns and forming a certain social network – for instance, the members were obliged to attend funerals and commendations, and even were bound by the commitment to financial support. At the same time, educated citizens formed a sort of elite within the brotherhood, which they also named. These men of letters, who constituted a smaller part

of the membership, undertook to sing together at divine services. The Dačice literary brotherhood was founded in the 1580s at the latest.

Your programme features the name of Jakub Josef Krimer, a figure still unfamiliar to the Czech audience. Who was he?

Jakub Josef Krimer was the most distinguished of the Dačice musicians in the second half of the 18th century. He hailed from the nearby village of Blížkovice, yet, unfortunately, we do not know any details about his life. According to the preserved reminiscences of his son Wenzel, Krimer was an organist and teacher of the second class at the “trivial” – today, we would say “primary” – school. Preserved from his time in Dačice has been quite an extensive manuscript collection of church compositions, some of which employ numerous instruments. Some of these pieces are maintained at the Dačice parish office, some at the Czech Museum of Music in Prague. At our festival, we performed in revived premiere Krimer’s *Aria in festo Corporis Christi* for alto, two violins and basso continuo. In terms of musical style, his creation could be classed within the 18th-century tradition formed by provincial teachers, many of whom, similarly to Krimer, in addition to giving lessons played at local churches, performing their own, mainly uncomplicated, compositions. First and foremost, these teachers were practical musicians who could sing, mastered several instruments, were capable of providing music for church needs and musical training to local school children. The role they played in the life of particular towns was thus quite important.

What other musical monuments can be found in Dačice?

I would like to mention another two, which I am very keen on. The first of them is a hand-written psalter, which, according to the latest findings of our leading musicologist, Martin Horyna, served for training school children. It is a collection of psalms, versified by the 16th-century Czech Brethren priest Jiří Strejc and arranged for four voices by the French composer Claude Goudimel. Most likely, the model for the Dačice manuscript was the 1618 Prague print *The Psalms, or Songs of Saint David*.

The other monument is a huge unique collection of liturgical autographs, which came into existence in the 18th century at the Dačice Franciscan Monastery. Three of them contain sacred motets, while the majority of the others are anonymous masses in chant and mensural notation (chant was the foundation of the Franciscan church music). The monastic statutes forbade figural music, that is, music involving song and instruments, yet besides chant the Franciscans performed at least monophony and two-part music in the contemporary style, accompanied by the organ. The most typical example of manuscripts containing masses was a series of three volumes, titled Chorus I, Chorus II and Organo. One of the masses is titled *Missa Michniana* and has been ascribed to Adam Michna of Otradovice, from the nearby town of Jindřichův Hradec.

You seem to be rightly proud of the musical history of your town, especially given that so many intriguing sources have been preserved there...

Yes, I am very proud indeed. And I would like to continue to make Dačice citizens and others alike familiar with our oldest musical monuments through concerts and recordings.

The following article attempts to give a brief characterisation of Czech improvised music scene and provide a list of selected places where you can encounter contemporary Czech and foreign improvisers.

A GUIDE TO CONTEMPORARY CZECH IMPROVISED MUSIC

Petr Vrba

PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER 3x

Improvisation, in my opinion, occupies a privileged position in the contemporary Czech alternative and experimental music milieu. After all, the alternative musicians' gravitation towards improvisation is also evident in the closest metropolises, Vienna and Berlin, with the latter being the mecca of a scene that has labelled itself as Echtzeitmusik, so as to avoid connotations relating to the notion of improvisation within the jazz idiom. Others speak of free improvisation or non-idiomatic improvisation.

What does the contemporary improvisation in the Czech Republic actually look like? With minor exceptions, it draws upon the sources, many a time filtered by the previous generations of foreign improvisers, which (simply put) sprang forth in the 1960s in the form of spontaneous creations of such collectives as AMM (whose table-top guitarist, Keith Rowe, has been a guest familiar in the Czech Republic), and which a decade later were brought to bear in the work of such industrial and noise creators as Britain's Throbbing Gristle, Japan's Hijokaidan and many others, who in their interpretation of the principles of the pre-war avant-garde (who will perhaps never cease to resonate "other" music) have endorsed the sound's liberation from the swaddling bounds of composition. And so it is not uncommon to see on stage, for instance, a virtuoso trumpet player in a concentrated, entirely seriously meant duo with a non-musician scratching a piece of amplified metal plate. Or with a person playing a typewriter. Or to observe a soloist who, by blowing a baritone saxophone,

whose microphone is driven by dozens of originally guitar effects, generates bass sound structures with occasional rock 'n' roll convulsions, while almost totally giving up on melody. Or a person who places all kinds of items on a turntable, producing wow and flutter. While backstage waits a guitar duo ready to perform a set in which not a single chord may appear yet it astonishes the audience with the telepathic interplay and the numerous unexpected sounds that can be drawn forth from guitars. And so on and so forth...

In this regard, contemporary improvisation is highly democratic, not putting finely honed instrumental virtuosity on the pedestal, giving preference rather to seeking interesting timbres and unthought-of forms of chime. The improvised music scene is home to plenty of soloists, plenty of ad hoc formations, many of them international – almost all improvisers are members of several, some of them dozens of, groups (who now and then get together to play or make a recording), appearing at concerts and festivals, on the stages of which they meet old acquaintances, with whom they have previously performed in various constellations. “Regular” bands, improvising every week in the peace of a practice room and only getting on stages once they have achieved the desired form, are rare indeed. The key words are happenstance, suggestion, non-finalisation, higher or lower risk that it will fall flat on its face, spontaneity – striving in vain to attain absolute perfection. A few years ago, it was a rather esoteric pursuit (and it had usually blown in from Berlin) during improvisation to ignore the adopted twists and approach an instrument and performance as though it were the first time ever, acting as if the musicians found themselves on the stage by pure chance.

The formative nature of improvising, on the other hand, has been emphasised by its currently most agile Czech protagonist and promoter, the trumpet, clarinet and vibrating loudspeakers player **Petr Vrba**: “I have always had somewhat different experiences with improvisation, and the more I have devoted to it and the more people who have devoted to it I have met, the more I believe in its ability to transform one into a better person... By means of improvisation, one learns again and again how to make decisions for which he/she, literally and word by word, puts his/her head on the block (the stage), and with repeated reflection polishing this ability. Such activity, repeated year by year, naturally transfers to the other layers of life too and influences, in my opinion, positively, the *modus vivendi*, etc. Just try to imagine our politicians bearing earnest liability for their decisions and even being able to reflect on their deeds in a responsible manner...”

Besides economic circumstances, the number of soloists has also increased owing to the advancement in technologies – today, anyone can buy something that is able to promptly respond to sonic impulses and fit into cabin hand luggage (a computer, tablet or smartphone, a mini-synth). Zdeněk Konečný, who has been organising in Hradec Králové a series of music events called MENU, is of the opinion that the “current accessibility of audio technology and the breadth of its use has often led music creators to experimenting with its non-traditional utilisation or making their own hardware, which has resulted in the tendency to bypass the fixed structure of performances, as well as music itself.”

In these respects, the contemporary Czech improvisers do not anyhow differ from their peers worldwide. Yet they do have, in my opinion, one specifically singular trait: they are not overly affected by jazz and composition. Whereas elsewhere in the world the link between wild contemporary improvisation, jazz and composition can be found in, for instance, the works of such universal figures as John Zorn or Fred Frith, at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s Czechoslovakia experienced a kind of attenuation, which was evidently caused not only by the political situation that ensued from “Normalisation”. Innovative jazzmen, such as Jiří Stivín, Emil Viklický and Laco Deczi, stuck to their professional careers and did not overly found their way to styles beyond the state-tolerated jazz. Free jazz was perhaps only programmatically embraced by the Free Jazz Trio Olomouc, while the Durman / Posejpal duo started in a similar vein, yet over the course of time they arrived at a totally singular, virtuoso, but absolutely non-jazz expression. The Jazz Section of the Union of Musicians, which was one of the precious few (and merely temporarily) experimental music event organisers tolerated by the authorities, deemed independent rock more interesting. In the 1970s and 1980s, the improvisation approach was tried by, among others, two legends of the Prague alternative rock scene: Kilhets and MCH Band. I would venture to say that the first modern improvisers in Bohemia were the numerous associations of musicians, non-musicians, visual artists and mystics bearing the bizarre title *Žabí hlen* (Frog Slime), capable of building hours-long, extremely suggestive and stratified musical structures.

“The scene in the Czech Republic is still pretty small, comparatively speaking, with few people that I would put at an international level of ability/experience,” says the American double-bass player **George Cremaschi**, who has been active

in the Czech Republic for 15 years and, among other things, was behind the establishment of the large-scale **Prague Improvisation Orchestra**, within which Czech improvisers meet foreign guests and indulge in collective, controlled improvisation. “The important and probably necessary crossover with other potentially interested scenes (jazz, noise, outrock, contemporary ‘classical’) hasn’t really happened, but there are signs that it is changing.”

The blending of noiseniks and improvisers with musicians (many of them a generation older) possessing experience with classical and jazz music has been particularly pursued in his programmes by the organiser **Pavel Straka**. “I do not only aim for pure, downright free, improvisation. I also strive to incorporate more traditional, especially folk and classical, music structures into free-jazz playing, or, vice versa, to smudge them with specific sounds or lo-fi electronics. The result is encounters of different musical worlds, as well as generations – the almost 70-year-old Vlastislav Matoušek flawlessly functions next to musicians in their twenties,” he says.

Where to go in Prague

Here starts our brief guide to improvisation venues in Prague and beyond. The small space of the **Rybanaruby** club, on the borderline between the Vinohrady and Žižkov quarters, near the TV tower and Plečnik’s church, may be considered by some to be too tearoom-like, yet Pavel Straka, who since May 2013 has organised there some 50, mainly improvised, concerts, finds the quasi-exotic milieu inspiring. The music has always “accompanied” something, for instance, as background to silent Soviet avant-garde films, while on other occasions the club has hosted performances of the graphic scores by the painter Jan Steklík (check out the excellent album released last year by the underground Guerilla Records) and the poet Václav Vokolek.

Besides the aforementioned composer, ethnomusicologist and multi-instrumentalist Matoušek, those who have appeared on the Rybanaruby stage include the saxophonists Jan Grunt, Michal Hrubý and Mikoláš Chadima (MCH Band, ex-Kilhets), possessing ample experience with jazz, “Schrammel” and experimental rock, creating joint soundtracks and implementations with the noiseniks Radek Kopel (whose band, Napalmed, have become a legend of the global noise scene) and Jan Polanský (a painter who recently “bought a few gadgets”), as well as, for example, the unclassifiable Tomáš Míka, seeking extended techniques of playing

the banjo, and the hyperactive handyman, multi-instrumentalist (from keyboard to cassette players without cassettes), publisher and music journalist Jan Faix aka Count Portmon. For three years now, Rybanaruby has been a fixed part of the Prague experimental music map, yet it has also hosted ethnic music concerts, seminars and other events, and hence is not a venue solely dedicated to improvised music.

The one and only place in Prague that could actually be considered a venue of this kind is the **Školská 28 - Komunikační prostor** (Communication Space). The white-rendered cube with large windows in the courtyard of a neo-Renaissance building houses several galleries, exclusively focused on sound art (the Dírа gallery is just a socket for headphones, so make sure to bring some along). The programme and image of the Školská 28 centre has been mainly determined by two figures spanning two generations. **Miloš Vojtěchovský** has played with the experimental singer-songwriter Oldřich Janota, is a curator, teacher, as well as a hunter and archivist of sounds. In the 1990s, he held multi-genre symposiums at the Cistercian Monastery in Plasy, at which improvised music – particularly acoustic, often crossing over to sound art and original music instruments – played the major role and softly, mainly acoustically, resounded in Jan Blažej Santini’s Baroquicised spaces.

In Vojtěchovský’s universe, silence and non-amplified sound enjoy great esteem – and at Školská 28, with regard to the building’s character, it isn’t actually possible to play music loudly. Petr Vrba, who is above all in charge of the centre’s programme, explains that “at Školská there are splendid acoustics for quiet pieces and delicate sound things, yet it is a disaster for noise and regular bands in general. Strings, for instance, sound wonderful there. Školská 28 is a rather cold place, a former workshop, there is no bar there. I think that one can easily concentrate on something, easily get lost in the music, yet if you were to listen to it at some underground club, you would leave, as you wouldn’t be able to get into it. Doing free jazz core or something similarly wild, or some noise things at some filthy dive, such as, for instance, a railway station pub, is a joy of another kind.” Vrba’s **IQ+1**, today perceived as a supergroup of contemporary Czech improvisers, have arrived at their compact, yet pure expression by rehearsing at Školská 28.

Vrba’s “joy of another kind” – a noisier, dirtier form of improvisation – agrees with the musicians grouped around the publisher and promotional unit **KLaNGundKRACH**. No longer as enclosed

as it was at the beginning, it has amalgamated with the culture-social fortnightly A2, and also encompasses the **Blood in the Boat** label and the promotional activities pursued by the French musician **Roman Krzycz**. All the key figures have emerged from industrial and noise, and can be characterised as striving to be as unpretentious, DIY and soiled with the urban milieu as possible. Harboured some bohemian traits, they like conducting their activities not only in clubs but also on various pop-up stages, including railway stations and pubs in general, places whose regulars have not previously heard anything about improvisation. They invite to the Czech Republic representatives of all sorts of world underground micro-scenes.

“In general, I consider improvisation a potentially very exciting method of work, yet I wouldn’t define it as fundamental. I cannot say that, as an organiser, I have been seeking or prioritising it. The fact that improvisation does make up a significant part of the concerts we organise is rather determined by the current constellation of minority music. The ‘noise’ label, for instance, has been fading a bit, I would say. Formerly, it also signified a type of music which today we would perhaps deem a noisier form of free improvisation,” says **K!amm**, the co-organiser of the **A2+** series and a member of the **Mooncup Accident**, **No Pavarotti** and **Fuck It Duet** formations. “But improvisation is not just a method; it is, unfortunately, also a genre with its own idiom and clear-cut audience, which results in an almost unhealthy degree of predictability having got into improvisation. By and large, there is an unwritten system of rules defining how to behave during free improvising – the players can choose from among the settled manners of playing, and the audience can select from an index of fixed expectations. Well, I can’t say I find this form of improvisation overly sexy...”

Those who prior to visiting Prague seek out an establishment that is a must for the ultra-hip will surely have come across the name **Cafe v lese**. Krymská street in the Vršovice quarter has become a sought-after party zone ever since the activist Ondřej Kobza took over an old, half-empty pub and turned it into something Prague, it would seem, had long been in need of. The once rather unalluring cellar is now an attractive venue, one of whose regular programme items is the **Wakushoppu** concert series. Every first Tuesday of the month, the basement of the Cafe v lese hosts an improvised performance, usually given by two musicians or

groups. The individual sets delivered by them are usually followed by a joint one.

“Over the course of time, we have grown together with the Cafe v lese basement, and it satisfies us. A certain underground quality is evidently pertinent to our production,” says **Tomáš Procházka**, a theatre-maker, multi-instrumentalist and producer, one of the most active and most versatile music seekers in the Czech Republic today, who, together with the author of the present article, has organised the Wakushoppu concerts. The idea of providing a platform in Prague at which one can, free of charge (no rent, entrance fee and the performer’s fees are paid), try out a new notion, present a fledgling project or simply play, has been materialised for the sixth year now. The publisher of this magazine, the Czech Music Information Centre, has to date released two CD compilations



of recordings made at Wakushoppu as covermounts to the HIS Voice magazine. The concerts' complete recordings and videos are freely available online.

... and where to go beyond Prague

The **Divadlo 29** centre in Pardubice takes pride in a magnificent theatre hall and a smaller club. Even though it may not be down to the magic of numerals, similarly to the Školská 28 venue in Prague, it can be deemed a distinct improvisation scene. The dramaturges and active musicians **Zdeněk Závodný** and **Jára Tarnovski** (who gets together within the **Gurun Gurun** band with Tomáš Procházka and others) seek to hold as many concerts as possible, and not only directly in the theatre building. They also strive to revive the genius loci of the university town and railway hub.

“We make use of, for instance, the Automatic Mills [by the Cubist and Functionalist architect Josef Gočár], the premises of the Pardubice railway station, the former Sirius cinema, or the officers' swimming pool in the complex of the former military shooting range,” says Závodný. “Over the past three years, we have held in these places a series of culture events, including concerts of improvised music. Perhaps we have best succeeded in this respect at the Automatic Mills complex, where we spent almost six months and whose spaces were extremely inspiring, allowing for great variability. When it comes to these unusual spaces, their genius loci definitely works in our favour. The events that took place at the mills attracted an unexpected number of visitors.”

Jan Faix aka Count Portmon





A similar emphasis on blending culture events with the spirit and history of a city has been placed by **Zdeněk Konečný** in nearby Hradec Králové. His **MENU** concert series is not primarily focused on improvisation, yet it affords improvisation considerable attention. Konečný does not build a single scene, seeking instead to incorporate his activities into the fabric of the city's life more generally, and so his experimental programmes have, for instance, become part of the official local festivities. Hradec Králové is a university town, possessing a remarkable geography and modern architecture – with Gočár's footprint being the most distinct – and Konečný makes sure that “the performances correspond to the given venue or locality. It's not a problem for me to accommodate a Baroque chapel to a production, not only as a concert place but also as, say, a non-traditional screening area, to make use of the multi-storeyed gallery of the concrete building of the Study and Research Library as a pop-up club with a packed programme, or a dive, replacing the regulars with a beakcore producer. Integrating an artistic performance with a non-traditional use of a venue is, in my opinion, a bonus value, which can serve as inspiration and motivation, not only for the artists themselves. I simply like creating a certain atmosphere, which is often more important than the technical (im)perfection of the performance. Of late, we have made ample use of Pilnáček's factory, which as a true brownfield complex represents a singular micro world affording plenty of opportunities for incorporating the grime of the industrial environment into the actual productions. I like it when I can, for instance, set up an impromptu noise concert on a pavement, whose duration and course, and the audience's response to it, cannot be estimated in advance. Our conception of improvisation is simply somewhat adrenaline-driven.”

The Czech Republic is a country with only one city with a population in excess of a million, yet in the east – in Moravia and Silesia – there are regional metropolises, Brno and Ostrava, each inhabited by approximately 400,000 people. The former occupies a significant position within the context of 20th-century Czech music as a place in which distinguished composers worked. In the 1980s, Brno was the birthplace of a remarkable offshoot of alternative rock and genre-unclassifiable experiments, with Iva Bittová being their best-known protagonist.

Over the past few years, the programmes of the traditional **Exposition of New Music** festival in Brno have been compiled by specialists in classical music and non-academics whose common aim has been to attain a blending of genres, to offer a non-

pigeonholing view of music, as well as to transfer concerts from conventional halls into non-traditional venues and spaces. Should you be about to visit the Moravian metropolis, make sure to check out a concert venue with the slightly provocative name **Praha** (Prague). Something is going on almost every day, and the fact that a space with such an audacious programme still exists more than a year since its opening can be considered a minor miracle. Now and then, interesting music events have also been taking place at the legendary **Skleněná louka** (Glass Meadow) centre and the **Kabinet múz** (Cabinet of Muses). The Brno cultural life has been markedly aided by the city's proximity to Bratislava and Vienna, which are closer than Prague. Hence, various international projects easily come into being.

The part of Silesia that is located within the territory of the Czech Republic has been above all connected with coal mines and iron-ore processing. Over the past few years, however, Ostrava has gained a reputation as a dynamically developing centre of culture. Opava, a small university town, a mere 30 kilometres distant from the Ostrava industrial landscape, seems to be from a different world. Improvised music has been thriving in Opava and Ostrava mainly owing to the activities pursued by the Opava-based association **Bludný kámen** (Erratic Boulder), whose director, **Martin Klimeš**, is deemed by many, including the author of the present article, to be the major promoter of experimental music in the Czech Republic. For over two decades, Klimeš has succeeded in facing up to the unfavourable situation and alluring audiences – in his native Opava in particular, people are accustomed to going to Bludný kámen without even knowing who will be performing. The organiser's brand is a guarantee of quality.

Furthermore, Klimeš is a curator of exhibitions and a culture activist. One of his programmes – the one-day Minimarathon of Electronic Music – has been presented within the biennial Ostrava Days, the leading festival of contemporary music held in the Czech Republic. He, however, does not actually consider himself to be a dyed-in-the-wool fan of improvising. “Only when I look back do I realise that the vast majority of our concerts, or better said, music-acoustic, as well as music-movement events, have been based on improvisation, or at least partial improvisation. I understand it as a natural modus of thinking and manifestation of contemporary experimental music. The initial intention was not to organise improvised events, that has only arisen on its own.” While in Opava, go to the Bludný kámen events at the **Matiční dům** or at the **Gottfrei** centre; in Ostrava, they have been held at the **Galerie výtvarných umění** (Gallery of Fine Arts) and the **Plato** gallery within the Vítkovice Ironworks complex, which, as a tourist, you are bound to visit anyway.

Just like the other organisers mentioned in this article (I should also add **Jaroslav Bašta** and his **Ostinato** in České Budějovice – if you get the chance to take in a concert at the House of Art, I recommend that you wander during the performance from one room of the gallery to another, so as to enjoy the incredible reverberation), Martin Klimeš has been involved in the **Stará síť na novou hudbu** (Old Net for New Music) association, within which promoters from various towns and cities have been sending to one another foreign artists, affording them the opportunity to give a mini tour of the Czech Republic. “The Divadlo 29 theatre is one of the founding members,” Zdeněk Závodný explains. “The aim with which the association was established was to create a network of promoters and culture centres that were willing to support and present Czech and foreign experimental music. The Net’s all-year programme consists of a series of concerts organised in various places in the Czech Republic. Its activities include the **Hear Me!** festival, held every year in a different region, with its programme being drawn up by the respective regional partner.” Most recently, the festival was prepared by the Divadlo 29 theatre in Pardubice, and the two-day programme was opulent indeed.

Improvisation versus...

This year, Prague will host a solely improvised music project at the end of April and the beginning of May, the second edition of the international **vs. Interpretation** festival, organised by

the Czech-American Agosto Foundation.

A major role in it has been played by Petr Vrba, as a dramaturge and producer.

“The first edition, in 2014, was novel owing to its stressing of the theoretical aspect of improvisation and its context,” Vrba explains enthusiastically.

“There were plenty of discussions, and the opportunity to talk about improvisation with George Lewis was for a lot of people devoting to improvisation to some degree a new, or at least refreshing and, I believe, inspiring experience. The second edition focuses more on the practical aspect and has several objectives with a common denominator, which is further support for improvisation as such – the scene itself, as well as expansion of awareness of it as a tool for some and life philosophy for others. Of significance too is that the festival will present a more comprehensive picture of the Lebanese scene, which around the turn of the millennium launched its activities virtually from scratch, and today is highly respected. Here I can see certain parallels with the Czech scene (the size, separateness from other genres, lack of concentrated support, etc.), which, however, is incomparable with the rest of the world when it comes to reflection. Who beyond our borders knows about, for instance, the long-term activities of Ivan Palacký with his amplified Dopleta knitting machine? Or who knows that the Czech Republic is home to such superlative young players as Tomáš Mika? I think that the opportunity to talk to Lebanese (as well as other) creators about such topics can be beneficial.”

The festival has also initiated several days of encounters between Czech and foreign artists, the results of which will be presented during its course. The dancer Julyen Hamilton will conceive a new piece together with five Czech and Slovak dancers in collaboration with Andrea Parkins. Within a three-day workshop with the Prague Improvisation Orchestra and a few foreign guests, Christof Kurzmann will produce a tailor-made composition. Several afternoon solo performances will be given at acoustically intriguing places in Prague, including the waste-water treatment plant in Bubeneč, where three decades ago Czech industrial music came into being, and a number of acoustic installations and performances will be held too (either at galleries or public spaces). “It is quite a concentrated event,” Petr Vrba adds, “one that evidently doesn’t have many parallels in this country as regards its focus and extent.” It sounds fabulous, enthusiastic, optimistic and noble. Let us hope that this event will become a tradition we can all enjoy.

MIROSLAV SRNKA: *SOUTH POLE*

It does not happen often that the Czech mainstream media report extensively about premieres of works by contemporary composers. Yet the staging of Miroslav Srnka's opera *South Pole* at the Bayerische Staatsoper was a cultural event that earned a degree of attention truly extraordinary. Media attention, of course, is not a criterion that in itself would indicate relevance, yet in this case the journalists hit the nail on the head.

At the present time, Miroslav Srnka (b. 1975) is the most internationally established Czech composer, with Germany in particular offering him above-standard opportunities. The commission from the Bayerische Staatsoper for a feature-length "grand" opera currently represents the apex of his career, at least when gauged by outer circumstances. Although Srnka's name is now well familiar to fans of contemporary art music, he is virtually unknown to the Classicist - Romantic music audience, a category most Munich opera visitors fall within too. Yet the Bayerische Staatsoper approached its commission in a truly exemplary manner: instead of opting for low-budget caution, it fully opened the floodgates of generosity, starting with vigorous promotion and ending with a stellar cast and a brilliant production team. In every respect it showed that it was serious about Srnka's opera.

The commission for the new stage work was preceded by the performance in 2011 of the chamber opera *Make No Noise* at the Munich Opera Festival. This marked Srnka's first collaboration with the Australian dramatist Tom Holloway, who penned the libretto. *Make No Noise* treats the (then)

typical Srnka "martyr-like" theme. I do not feel like returning to the polemics about what music can and cannot be about, hence I refer those interested to my interview with Srnka published in CMQ 2012/2. The reason why I am mentioning the matter here is with the aim to point out how very fortunate I deem the selection of the theme in the case of *South Pole*. The story of two expeditions, competing for primacy in reaching the South Pole, possesses the dimensions of a great narrative and drama, an aspect that evidently agrees with Srnka, while, on the other hand, we somehow perceive it as an adventure from a world other than our own. Accordingly, we do not find ourselves taken to a sphere whereby the artist applies someone else's distress with the aim to justify a genre as artificial and stylised as opera is, or as a pretext for furnishing momentousness to a genre as semantically unspecific as instrumental music is. Notwithstanding the tragic fate of Scott's expedition, we actually tread within the dimensions of a sweet "escape elsewhere", which we experience when reading Verne's novels or watching adventure films - because adventure is always beautiful, even when it involves death, as it takes place "elsewhere", with this elsewhere being the basic precondition





PHOTO: WILFRIED HOSL 2x

Rolando Villazón, Joshua Owen Mills

of the game. And the rivalry between Amundsen and Scott was a game of its kind too: not a blow of fate, but a voluntary decision; not the impossibility to flee, but an endeavour to attain something that in effect is “not necessary”; not a fatal confrontation, which we did not choose, but de facto a male sport competition. For Scott’s expedition, all these “nots” ultimately become a reality, yet here we are already within an adventure; the initial premise of its being a game can no longer be changed. By and large, the story of Scott’s death (*pars pro toto*) is not a story from life. It is a story for an opera, for instance.

Srnka and Holloway have branded their opera with the neologism *double opera*. On a cross-wise divided stage, we observe the behaviour and fates of the two expeditions simultaneously, with the exception of the moment of arrival at the South Pole itself, which the expeditions reached with a more than month-long interval - here the sequence of scenes is traditionally chronological: first the stage belongs to the victorious expedition of Amundsen’s (baritones) and subsequently we see the disappointed team of Scott (tenors). Despite this formal staging anomaly, *South Pole* is treated as an essentially

conventional, linear narration - in the manner of film cut, we for a while simply follow the left part of the stage, then the right for some time, and although the two parts are, to a greater or smaller degree, visually active at the same time, there are few moments of real simultaneity, when singing takes place concurrently. And such very moments, prevailing at the beginning of the first part, were those I found the least accomplished. The excessive emphasis placed on the analogical conduct and feelings of the members of both expeditions, additionally augmented by static, even stiff, direction, came across as redundant and embarrassing. (After all, this also negates one of the sources of tension, declared by the creators: that the two expeditions are vexed by excruciating uncertainty as to how the rival expedition is doing, since they cannot anyhow communicate. It is merely stated, without being co-experienced from the audience’s perspective.)

In the dramatically best moments, the opera’s “duality” simply recedes into the background in favour of standard changing of scenes. Holloway’s libretto is better to read than to



Kevin Connors, Rolando Villazón, Thomas Hampson

listen to (by the way, the singers were virtually incomprehensible, which I consider precarious). Notwithstanding the librettist's efforts for achieving a lapidary compression, which works well on paper, when listening to the opera I had the persistent impression that the text was too flooded. This feeling recurred primarily in the opera's first half. What should be praised is that almost (if not) every detail in the libretto is based on real facts, which bears witness to Holloway's evidently thorough background research. The opera's action axis strictly adheres to the history, omitting very little of the reality. When it comes to the psychological characterisation of the dramatis personae, Holloway's libretto is effective by opera standards, though overall imbued with a sort of slightly naïve "likeable regular Joe" tone, which comes to the surface during, for instance, the scenes of Amundsen's betrayed suicidal girlfriend, with Scott's jealousy of his wife not being devoid of the taint of kitchen-sink drama either.

Although it is not fair to gauge works of art against the expectations which we subconsciously arrive with, I cannot help but wonder about how little real and imaginary (metaphorical) space *South Pole* reflects. How little evoked is the emptiness, surpassing human standards. I understand that opera is about singing, yet, with respect to the subject, I found the work's permanently conversational mode strange, lacking longer, purely musical, dividing lines, whereby Srnka's music could be made ring to the full, while the stage director could have done more than merely positioning the declaiming figures in the direction of the auditorium. I do not need four semi-transparent walls with a projection plainly suggesting the faraway, inhospitable Antarctic landscape, nevertheless, the stage's constant closing backwards is startling. I do not need to be visually astonished, yet I still feel that the stage should change more markedly (after all, that is what the instrumental interludes are for in every decent opera...). I am allergic to vociferously advertised "light design", yet all the same it seems to me that the work with the lighting could have been more differentiated. All that is called for by both the opera's subject and the milieu in which it is set, especially when taking into account the chosen manner of narrative. It is precisely the paradoxical lack of spaces, temporal and physical alike, that has resulted in the production not coming across as magnificently as it perhaps could, and should, have.

From a certain viewpoint, Srnka's score is overloaded too. Criticism in this regard has been voiced, yet I don't think it is substantiated. Great density of the musical course of events and hectic musical

gestures have been a trait present in Srnka's music since the beginning, and over the past five or six years in particular it would seem that Srnka has found a way of treating this essential inclination of his in a masterful manner and also, within the intentions of his "narrative", emotionally and dramatically well-founded composing, he is able to balance it with another type of material, without resorting to cheaply contrastive polarities and the so-called lucid form. In my opinion, the music for *South Pole* is the summit of Srnka's work to date. After all, serving as proof in this respect are the autonomous pieces that have passed over to *South Pole* (?), or, vice versa, have been derived from it as a kind of "continuous suites" (?). Those who have heard Srnka's *Piano Concerto, No Night No Land No Sky, move 01 / move 02* and other compositions dating from the past few years, find themselves, when listening to *South Pole*, on familiar ground. And it would perhaps not be possible otherwise, given Srnka's busyness (the sheer volume of work required for an opera such as *South Pole* is formidable). What is more, it is entertaining to observe how identical musical moments peculiarly change the way they come across in a different context (compare, for instance, the typically Srnka "apotheosis" in the piano concerto, which is heard in *South Pole* upon Amundsen's attaining his triumph in a rather different light).

I also feel obliged to highlight that nowhere does Srnka lapse into primitive onomatopoeia (although the percussion parts in particular do now and then approach this perilous boundary, it does not appear that they ever cross it) or simplistic pedal points, dramatic arrests or other conventional means, commonly advised so as to "raise tension" and "suspend time" – and, indeed, plenty of similar measures could be devised for the specific Antarctic setting. I have returned to the question of the lacking "free" space – Srnka is evidently capable of building vast, "slow" musical structures at a level significantly higher than, for instance, snail tempo with a host of pretentious fermatas and meaningful pauses. I think that in his opera he should have afforded more time to music alone to the detriment of the sung passages. It would have been worthwhile.

Also because, contrariwise, I did not deem Srnka's treating of the vocal parts satisfactory – a sort of unspecific, "generic" semi-declamatory style prevails, one that has been so customary in operas ever since approximately the time of Janáček, resting in interval and rhythmic "blow-up" of the emotionally tinted language (or that which the composer imagines as the emotion). In Srnka's defence, it must be pointed out that precious few have succeeded in tackling this

problem and that the best passages of *South Pole* – that is, virtually the entire second half – allow the listener to forget about his rather routine manner of "language set to music". At this juncture, I consider it redundant to assess the performances given by the singers, with the standard being high, just as expected. Yet the question remains of the aforementioned incomprehensible pronunciation of the text (which comes as somewhat of a surprise, given that the cast includes several native speakers).

My one and only significant doubt as to the performance pertains to the fact that, for the most part, I had the feeling that the huge orchestra should have been louder – I had to constantly prick up my ears and, if I could, I would have turned up the volume. I am not able to judge whether it is a problem of the music itself, the conductor, the venue or my seat (the 12th row in the parterre, a nominally excellent position). In my view, the orchestral pit levied from Srnka's complex, highly elaborate score a rather cruel tax, even though it is possible that listening may have been better in other parts of the auditorium (and it allegedly was on the balcony and the upper galleries).

Miroslav Srnka: *South Pole*

A double opera in two parts

Libretto: Tom Holloway

Commissioned by the Bayerische Staatsoper, premiered on 31 January 2016 (Performance reviewed: 6 February 2016)

Conductor: Kirill Petrenko
 Stage direction: Hans Neuenfels
 Sets: Katrin Connan, Hans Neuenfels
 Costumes: Andrea Schmidt-Futterer
 Lighting design: Stefan Bolliger
 Bayerisches Staatstheater

Robert Scott – Rolando Villazón
 Roald Amundsen – Thomas Hampson
 Kathleen Scott – Tara Erraught
 [Amundsen's] landlady – Mojca Erdmann
 Lawrence Oates – Dean Power
 Edward "Uncle Bill" Wilson – Kevin Connors
 Edgar Evans – Matthew Grills
 Henry "Birdie" Bowers – Joshua Owen Mills
 Oscar Wisting – John Carpenter
 Helmer Hanssen – Christian Rieger
 Hjalmar Johansen – Tim Kuypers
 Olav Bjaaland – Sean Michael Plumb
 Bayerische Staatsoper extras – dogs, ponies

CZECH MUSIC EVERY DAY

EVENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD

FROM THE BEGINNING OF DECEMBER 2015 TO THE END OF FEBRUARY 2016

In the winter, no contemporary music festivals or events of similar focus are held in the Czech Republic, with the majority of the domestic orchestras and ensembles mainly performing, particularly in December, well-known and popular classical repertoire works within Christmas programmes. Yet this winter, notable exceptions in this respect were the world premiere of Jan Vičar's *Žitkovské bohyně* (The Goddesses of Žitková), a piece inspired by Kateřina Tučková's bestselling novel, given by the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra in Olomouc, and the BERG Orchestra's concert at which they first performed Jana Vöröšová's composition *Slyšíš ty ptáky* (You Hear the Birds). Standing out from among the traditionally conceived New Year's Eve concerts was that of the Brno Philharmonic, which marked the orchestra's 60th anniversary and which included the screening of a 1960s documentary about their tour of the United Kingdom, titled *Cesta* (The Journey), to new music created by Miloš Štědroň.

In the wake of the Christmas lull, in January and February, Czech orchestras performed several new works by Czech composers. The Prague Philharmonia premiered at the Rudolfinum Michal Neješek's *I Hear the Sky*, the Prague Chamber Orchestra premiered Vladimír Franz's *Pražské divertimento* (Prague Divertimento), while the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra presented within a single concert three new pieces for string quartet and symphony orchestra – Martin Kumžák's *Šroubovice* (The Helix), Petr Wajsar's *Cigánská ouvertura* (The Gypsy Overture) and Jan Kučera's *Zrození* (The Birth), the latter of whom also conducted the whole crossover evening. Audiences in cities beyond Prague had the opportunity to hear the world premiere given by the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra in Olomouc of *Century Dance*, Zdeněk Merta's symphonic transcription of five 20th-century dances, while the Ensemble Opera Diversa, at a concert launching their debut CD, premiered in Brno *Chamber Symphony No. 2* for oboe, piano, percussion and strings, written by their court composer Ondřej Kyas.

When it comes to Czech opera, an event of international significance was the world premiere of Miroslav Srnka's *South Pole* at the Bavarian State Opera (see the review in this issue of CMO). Opera houses abroad have continued to show a keen interest in Leoš Janáček's works, above all *Jenůfa* and *The Makropulos Affair*. During the course of the winter, new productions of Janáček operas were premiered in Germany, Austria, Italy, Sweden, Poland and Japan. A work that is not generally known is Viktor Ullmann's opera *The Emperor of Atlantis*, composed in 1943 and 1944 at the Terezín



The Cunning Little Vixen at the Teatro Regio Torino, Italy

PHOTO: RAMELLA & GIANNESSE

concentration camp, a new production of which was staged at the renowned Dresden Semperoper. Noteworthy in connection with Ullmann is the first international conference focused on the life and work of his contemporary Pavel Haas, which was held at Cardiff University.

We have good news for those who would like to read more about these and other major Czech music events – since January, the HIS blog, on whose contributions this summary has been based, has also been available in English. You can find it at <http://blog.musica.cz/en>. I would also like to point out that the blog is open to readers' tips and comments. So feel free to contact us by emailing his.blog@musica.cz.

- 7 December, Czech Museum of Music, Prague. **Jana Vöřořová: *Slyšíš ty ptáky (You Hear the Birds)* – world premiere.** BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábel, video projection: Frances Sanders, Dima Berzon.
- 10 December, Reduta, Olomouc. **Jan Vičar: *Žitkovské bohyně (The Goddesses of Žitková)* – world premiere.** Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra, mezzo-soprano: Barbora Martínková-Polášková, conductor: Marek Štilec.
- 12 December, Biwako Hall Center for the Performing Arts, Ōtsu, Japan. **Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka* – premiere of a new production.** Director: Keiichi Nakamura, conductor: Shuya Okatsu.
- 13 December, Vienna State Opera, Vienna, Austria. Leoš Janáček: ***The Makropulos Affair* – premiere of a new production.** Director: Peter Stein, conductor: Jakub Hruša. Further performances: 18, 20 and 23 December.
- 1 January, Janáček Theatre, Brno. Miloš Štědroň: ***Cesta (The Journey)* – world premiere.** Brno Philharmonic Orchestra, conductor: Ondřej Lenárd.
- 2 January, St. Wolfgang Church, Rottenacker, Germany. Contemporary Czech Composers festival. **Věra Čermáková: *Landscapes.*** Saxophone: Christian Segmehl, organ: Ludwig Kibler.
- 16 February, Hessian State Theatre Wiesbaden, Germany. **Leoš Janáček: *Katya Kabanova* – premiere of a new production.** Director: Matthew Wild, conductor: Zsolt Hamar. Further performances: January 21, 24, 27 and 30, February 4, 7 and 20.
- 17 January, Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague. Michal Nejtěk: ***I Hear the Sky* – world premiere.** PKF – Prague Philharmonia, conductor: Emmanuel Villaume.

DECEMBER-FEBRUARY

- 19 January, Teatro Regio, Turin, Italy. **Leoš Janáček: *The Cunning Little Vixen* – premiere of a new production.** Director: Robert Carsen, conductor: Jan Latham-Koenig. Further performances: January 20, 23, 24 and 26.
- 21, 22 and 23 January, Boston Symphony Hall, Boston, Massachusetts. **Concerts of music by Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák and Bohuslav Martinů.** B. Smetana: *Moldau*, B. Martinů: *Fantaisies symphoniques*, A. Dvořák: *Cello Concerto in B minor*, Op. 104. Boston Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Ludovic Morlot.
- 30 January, Cardiff University, UK. **Pavel Haas Study Day** – an international conference. A concert of Haas's music given by the Graffe Quartet.
- 31 January, Bavarian State Opera, Munich, Germany. **Miroslav Srnka: *South Pole* – world premiere.** Libretto: Tom Holloway, director: Hans Neuenfels, conductor: Kirill Petrenko. Further performances: February 3, 6, 9 and 11, July 5, 2016, January 18, 21 and 23, 2017.
- 1 February, Smetana Hall, Municipal House, Prague. **Martin Kumžák: *Šroubovice (The Helix)*, Petr Wajsar: *Cigánská ouvertura (The Gypsy Overture)* and Jan Kučera: *Zrození (The Birth)* – world premieres.** Epoque Quartet, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Jan Kučera.
- 2 February, Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague. **Vladimír Franz: *Pražské divertimento (Prague Divertimento)* – world premiere.** Prague Chamber Orchestra, concertmaster: Alexej Rosík.
- 4 February, Reduta, Olomouc. **Zdenek Merta: *Century Dance* – world premiere.** Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra, trumpet: Ondřej Jurčeka, conductor: Emil Skoták.
- 7 February, Großes Haus Altenburg, Altenburg, Germany. **Leoš Janáček: *Jenůfa*.** Director: Kay Kuntze, conductor: Laurent Wagner. Further performances: February 11 and 12, March 12.
- 10 February, Mozart Hall, Reduta, Brno. **Ondřej Kyas: *Chamber Symphony No. 2 for oboe, piano, percussion and strings* – world premiere.** Ensemble Opera Diversa, oboe: Vilém Veverka, piano: Alice Rajnhohová, percussion: Martin Opršál, conductor: Gabriela Tardonová.
- 13 February, Tiroler Landestheater Innsbruck, Innsbruck, Austria. **Leoš Janáček: *The Makropulos Affair* – premiere of a new production.** Director: Kurt Josef Schildknecht, conductor: Francesco Angelico. Further performances: March 3, 10 and 17, April 8, 13, 17, 24 and 30, May 6.
- 19 February, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Berlin, Germany. **Leoš Janáček: *The Makropulos Affair* – premiere of a new production.** Director: David Hermann, conductor: Donald Runnicles. Further performances: February 25 and 28, April 27 and 30.
- 19 February, Semper 2, Semperoper Dresden, Dresden, Germany. **Viktor Ullmann: *The Emperor of Atlantis* – premiere of a new production.** Director: Christianne Lutz, conductor: Johannes Wulff-Woesten. Further performances: February 21, 25, 27 and 28, March 2, 3, 5 and 6.
- 20 February, Small Stage, J. K. Tyl Theatre, Plzeň. **Jiří Teml: *Puss in Boots* – premiere of a new version.** Director: Lilka Ročáková, music director and piano: Martin Marek, choirmaster: Zdeněk Vimr. Further performances: March 12, 15, 19 and 26, April 21, May 3 (2x) and 18.
- 20 February, Bürgerhaus, Allmendingen, Germany. Contemporary Czech Composers festival. **Eduard Douša: *Summer Jazzatina, Saxonatina*.** Saxophone: Christian Segmehl, piano: Moritz Eggert.
- 25 February, NorrlandsOperan, Umeå, Sweden. **Leoš Janáček: *The Cunning Little Vixen* – premiere of a new production.** Director: Wilhelm Carlsson, conductor: Dalia Ståsevska. Further performances: February 27 and 28, March 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9.
- 26 and 28 February, Teatr Wielki, Poznań, Poland. **Leoš Janáček: *Jenůfa*.** Director: Alvis Hermanis, conductor: Gabriel Chmura.
- 28 February, New National Theatre Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan. **Leoš Janáček: *Jenůfa*.** Director: Christof Loy, conductor: Tomáš Hanus. Further performances: March 2, 5, 8 and 11.

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Music and musical culture in the Czech lands during the reign of Emperor Rudolf II Rudolfine Prague Composers

Under the reign of Emperor Rudolf II, a number of composers and musicians were employed at the court in Prague. Their hierarchy, relationships and organisation were described at the beginning of our special series (CMQ 2015/3). The following text presents a few of the distinguished composers who made a great impact on the musical culture in Rudolfine Prague and whose significance even crossed the borders of the Kingdom of Bohemia.

Philippus de Monte
(1521, Mechelen - 4 July 1603, Prague)
Sacrae Caesaris Majestatis Capellae
Magister.

Petr Daněk

In 1555, Imperial Vice-Chancellor Georg Seld, delegated by Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria to seek in Brussels new musicians for the court in Munich, sent to his employee a letter dated 22 September, in which he described Philippus de Monte as man “quiet, taciturn, restrained like a maiden (*wie ein junkfrau*), who has spent the major part of his life in Italy and speaks Italian like a native ... yet also masters Latin, French and Flemish, and there is no doubt about his being the best composer in the whole country, particularly as regards the new art and the *musica reservata* technique.” This recommendation notwithstanding,

De Monte was not hired and the job in Bavaria was given to his no less distinguished compatriot Orlando di Lasso. Thirteen years later, he assumed a similarly prestigious post, that of Kapellmeister of the Habsburgs, which he would hold for 35 years.

**Philippus de Montay: contrabassus,
praeceptor and petit vicaire**

We do not know much about Philippus de Monte’s family background. His last will and testament, which he drew up shortly before his death in Prague, on 21 January 1603, does however disclose his relatives, including two siblings. He was born in 1521, the year in which Josquin Despréz passed away, in Mechelen, nearby Antwerp, Belgium. Similarly to the majority of 16th-century composers, he gained his initial musical training at the church in his native town: at the Saint Rumbold Cathedral in Mechelen he sang in the boys’ choir. As for his later life, the next preserved data document his teaching music in Naples, where he stayed with the family of the banker Domenico Pinelli, with whom he was still in contact in the 1580s, when he already lived in Prague and when he regularly wrote to his former pupil, then an influential and wealthy banker, Gian Vincenzo Pinelli about the events at the Imperial court. From 1548 to 1556, he worked on and off at the cathedral in Cambrai as “*petit vicaires*”, yet he was also referred to as “*Philippus bassus*”. De Monte continued to be a beneficiary at this cathedral, which he received upon an Imperial decree, during his tenure at the Habsburg court. In 1554 and 1555, as a singer he accompanied Philip II of Spain during his trip to England in connection with the King’s marriage to Mary Tudor. While in England, De Monte met the Byrd family and befriended the young

William Byrd, who would become a noted composer. The two men remained in regular contact in the years to come, bearing witness to which are their creations. Subsequently, De Monte returned to his native Belgium, yet he did not stay for long and soon left for Italy. Serving to document his sojourn in Italy is a madrigal he composed to mark the wedding of Isabella de Medici and Paolo Giordano Orsini, as well as the failed negotiations in 1562 with the aim to obtain the post of *maestro di cappella* at the Basilica di San Marco in Venice, vacated after the death of Adrian Willaert. His other, only partially satisfied, ambitions were focused on Naples, as proven by the numerous motet collections he dedicated to the aristocratic representatives of the Kingdom of Naples, primarily Cardinal Flavio Orsini.

Servus devotissimus

De Monte got to the Habsburg court following the death of the Kapellmeister Jacobus Vaet (1567). Emperor Maximilian II first considered hiring Francisco Roselluso, Kapellmeister at the Basilica di San Lorenzo in Rome, who, however, had long-term problems with alcoholism. Then he attempted to engage Palestrina, whom he ultimately rejected owing to his requiring too much money. In the end, Maximilian chose Philippus de Monte, who, at the time 47 years of age, was working in Rome or Naples, possibly in the services of Cardinal Orsini. De Monte joined the court in Vienna on 1 May 1568, after waiting 12 months for the Emperor's decision. He would spend the rest of his long and fruitful life in the Habsburgs' services. During his time at the court, he headed a large representative choir, made up of singers of various nationalities, who, in line with the 16th-century tradition, performed vocal polyphonic pieces at divine services and the court's major secular events. In addition, De Monte was named an Imperial composer and taught young boys to sing. After Rudolf II had relocated the court from Vienna to Prague, in the late 1570s he too moved to the new Habsburg capital, where he would live for almost a quarter of a century. According to the remarks in his correspondence, he stayed in a house in the Old Town Square. De Monte died in Prague on 4 July 1603 and, on the basis of his wish, mentioned in his last will and testament, was buried at the Saint James Basilica in the Old Town.



Rafaël Sadeler, Sr.: a portrait of the composer Philippus de Monte, with his personal motto "Rien sans peine", 1594

Prattica di musica

De Monte was the most prolific composer of **madrigals** in the history of the genre. His first book of madrigals was published in 1554 in Rome (a year later, the first book of Orlando di Lasso's madrigals was issued in Venice), the final one in 1600. De Monte's compiled a total of 34 collections of madrigals for three to seven voices, with the majority of them being for five and six parts. With regard to their sheer volume alone, the style of his madrigals is rather difficult to characterise, owing in part to the fact that they have yet to be published in a modern edition. When the first series of De Monte's works was prepared under the guidance of Charles van de Borren, a negative role was played by the outbreak of World War I, while the second edition, initiated by R. B. Lenaert, was halted in 1988 owing to a lack of finance necessary to bring the project to fruition. The indisputable traits of De Monte's madrigals include an astonishing melodic invention, with the other singular features including alternating of rhythms and an almost abrupt transformation of the overall sound. They come across as very subtle and altogether lacking in Italian superficiality.

It would seem that De Monte did not deem **chansons** to be as important as motets and madrigals. And owing to the incomprehensibility of their language, French chansons did not enjoy great popularity at the Central European Habsburg court. A special position in Monte's oeuvre was occupied by chansons to Pierre de Ronsard's poems, which were extremely fashionable in Europe in the 1570s and 1580s. Typical of De Monte's chansons (Sonetz de Pierre de Ronsard, printed in 1575 in Leuven and Paris) was a symmetrical structure, frequent repetition of various musical passages, with another common feature being that the sonnet's two quartets were underlined with identical music.

De Monte's **sacred music** could be defined as something between Palestrina's mystique and Lasso's drama. The first print of his motets dates from 1572, when he was 51 years of age, and they are the creations of a mature composer. Characteristic of his sacred music was the alternation of imitative counterpoint and homophony, as well as the frequent employment of syllabic declamation of all the vocals, especially in the places with important lyrics. When De Monte used dissonance, he mainly did so to illustrate selected passages of a text or a specific word. Just as in the case of secular music, his sacred music contained frequent alternating of metre.

Musicum hoc nostro seculo principem

Throughout his life and career, De Monte associated with numerous prominent figures, particularly musicians and other artists. As has been mentioned above, he was a friend of William Byrd, whom in all likelihood he had encountered in 1555 during his trip to England (although new research has revealed that they might have met later, introduced to each other by Thomas Tallis). At the time, Byrd was 12 years old. Later on, when he was a renowned composer, Byrd and De Monte sent to each other compositions that were far more eloquent than many a letter. A manuscript housed at the British Museum, Ms Add. 23624, contains two works: De Monte's motet for eight voices *Super flumina Babylonis*, with the period inscription "Sent by him to Mr. Wm Bird, 1583", and another motet for eight voices, set to the second part of Psalm 136/137, *Quomodo cantabimus*, with the note "Made by Mr Wm Byrd to send in to Mr Philip de Monte, 1584". Both

of them are masterpieces of their creators, who by means of rhetorical figures, for instance, the words "flevimus" (we cry) or "captivos" (captives), imparted to each other their feelings and opinions of the era and society. To explain the situation, Byrd was then a Catholic in Protestant England and De Monte was pondering leaving the Imperial court. De Monte was also in regular contact with Orlando di Lasso, and the two men wrote to each other letters indicating mutual trust and collegial friendship. Furthermore, he knew and was in touch with the distinguished Flemish botanist Charles de l'Ecluse (their extensive, very interesting correspondence has been preserved), as well as Thomas Mermann, a notable physician who also played a role in the life of Orlando di Lasso. The number of musicians De Monte was acquainted with was large, including Ingegneri, Monteverdi, Felis and Massaini. Some of them mentioned him as their teacher in the titles of their prints (Giovanni Battista della Gostena, Jean Macque, Jan Sixt of Lerchenfels), others were influenced by his work and personal example (Luython, Regnart). Naturally, he was also in contact with other Rudolfine Prague artists, among them, the painter Bartholomeus



A portrait of the engraver Aegidius Sadeler (1570, Antwerp – 1629, Prague)

Spranger and the author Johanna Westonia, who dedicated to De Monte one of her poems for his selfless help in distress and dubbed him the greatest composer of the time. Bearing witness to his personal contacts with the representatives of the top classes are the introductions to his numerous printed works, containing dedications to them (Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, Ferdinand de Medici, Emperor Maximilian II, Emperor Rudolf II, Wolfgang Rumpf, Vojtěch Fürstenberg, Isabella Medici Orsina, Ottavio Spinola, Sigismund Bathori, Adam Dietrichstein, Archbishop Martin Medek, and others).

Rien sans peine

Several paintings depicting Philippus de Monte have been preserved, with the portrait of him created in 1594 by Rafael Sadeler having been most frequently printed to the present day. It captures the composer at the age of 73 with his life motto: Rien sans peine (Nothing Without Labour). Even though evidently an introvert and individualist, as was indicated in the quoted letter by Georg Seld, and even though he learned music in dynamic Italy, De Monte's oeuvre does not contain anything as extravagant or bold as the music of Giaches de Wert, Cipriano de Rore and the Italian composers of his generation. The southern impact actually only reflected in his penchant for the Italian language and madrigals. De Monte wrote music of all genres. During the period from his entering the services of the Habsburgs up to his death in 1603, he produced an enormous amount of works, with at least one being published every year by printers throughout Europe. His pieces were issued in Antwerp, Rome, Paris, Leuven and, most often, Venice. As mentioned by Seld in the above-quoted letter, they were in a way *musica reservata*, music for a small group of connoisseurs, and each composition reveals a great master, applying complex counterpoint replete with rhetorical figures and rhythmic intricacies. In sonic terms, it is strange music, in some respects different from the common contemporary creations. Unlike in the case of his peers, Palestrina and Orlando di Lasso, for instance, his personality and work have not given rise to any posthumous cult, and his music basically soon fell into oblivion. To a certain extent, this was evidently influenced by the fact that less than a decade after his passing away, Rudolf II died too. The Emperor thought so highly of De Monte that he did not even appoint a successor. And the relocating of the Habsburg capital back to Vienna resulted in the breaking of the continuity of Prague's court orchestra, which De Monte co-formed for a long



Carl Luython, *Missa Quodlibetica trium vocum*, a book of masses, Prague, 1609

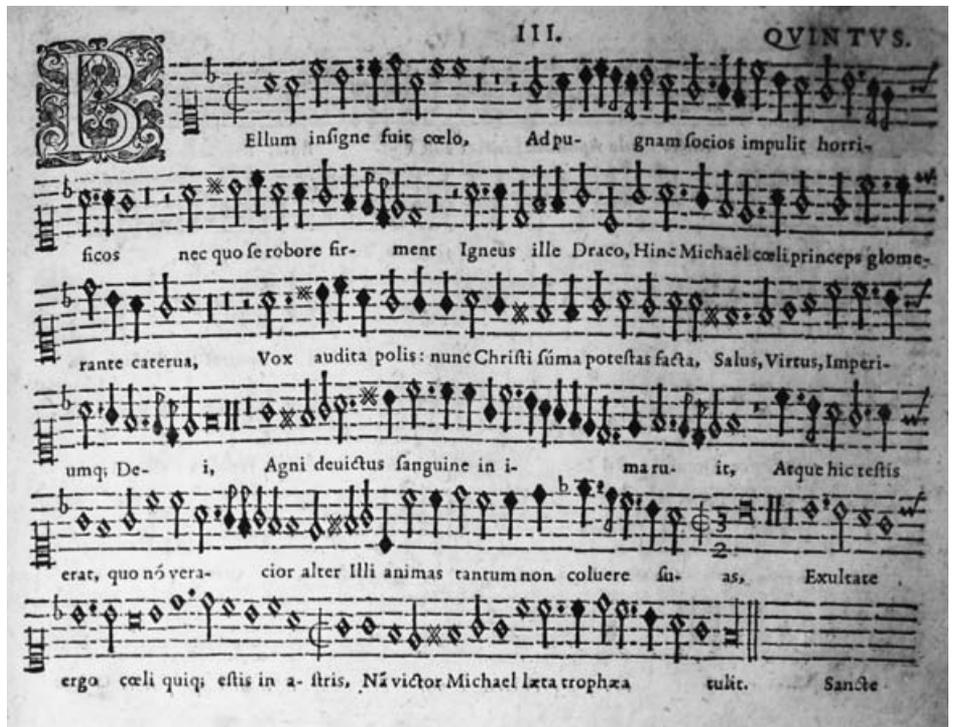
time. The new ensemble, established by Emperor Matthias, who ascended the throne after Rudolf II, was made up of other musicians, above all Italians, and performed a new style: solo, early-Baroque pieces, which primarily served to adorn the increasing number of court festivities. And the neglected prints and autographs of Philippus de Monte's music were moved to libraries and archives. His music is still awaiting rediscovery. Rien sans peine.

Carl Luython A Rudolfine motet and madrigal composer

Šárka Hálečková, Jan Bilwachs

Kammermusik, Hoforganist, Hofkomponist... A loyal Flemish servant of the Habsburgs

As the title of this article indicates, Carl Luython performed several duties at Rudolf II's court in Prague. Only fragments of information are available pertaining to his life prior to joining the Imperial ensemble. The Antwerp archival sources document that he hailed from a teacher's family and that Antwerp was his native city, yet they do not



Carl Luython, the Quintus voice from the motet *Bellum insigne fuit caelo*

provide the date of his birth. We thus have to rely on indirect information, according to which we can assume that Luython was born between 1556 and 1558, and that he gained his rudimentary musical training from his father. In 1566, when he was approximately nine years of age, within the casting of choir boys, he was accepted to the Imperial court in Vienna, where he continued to study music, under the guidance of the Kapellmeisters Philippus de Monte and Jacobus Vaet, and the organist Wilhelm Formellis, who probably taught him how to play the instrument. In 1571, when his voice broke, Luython was released as a boy soprano and, as were other transalpine musicians, sent to Italy, where over the next five years he most likely further honed his skills and prepared for his future job as a musician. In 1576, he left Italy and returned to the court in Vienna, to assume the post of *Kammernusikus*. In addition to his being an organist with the Imperial orchestra, he also attended to the monarch's private entertainment. In the wake of the death of Emperor Maximilian II, Luython went on to serve as *Kammernusikus* and *Hoforganist* for his successor, Rudolf II, up until 1612, when, following the Kaiser's passing, the majority of the Hofkapelle was sacked. Luython died in Prague in poverty in August 1620, three months before the Battle of White Mountain.

In comparison with that of the other composing musicians at Rudolf II's court, Luython's oeuvre was not extensive. This is quite understandable, as he was busy executing his obligations as a court organist: not only pertaining to divine services, the Imperial Parliament sessions, attended by Rudolf II, but also during the reconstruction of the organ at Saint Vitus Cathedral in Prague, supervising the repair work headed by the organ-builder Albrecht Rudner. None the less, Luython's music was an integral part of the period repertoire. Besides motets and madrigals, he composed masses, hymns and works for keyboard. The Prague-based printer Jiří Nigrin published his *Lamentationes Jeremiae Prophetiae*. Many of his pieces were included in music anthologies and historical manuscripts. The appreciation Luython's music enjoyed can be documented by the fact that in the wake of the death of Philippus de Monte in 1603 he was appointed the Imperial orchestra composer.

Il primo libro de madrigali

The one and only collection of Carl Luython's madrigals was printed by the famed Venice music publisher Angelo Gardano. Titled *Il primo libro de madrigali a cinque voci*, it was issued in the autumn of 1582. The volume was dedicated to the "illustrious



A portrait of Johann Fugger

signor Gioan Fugger, Baron of Kirchberg and Weissenhorn” (All’illustrissimo signor il signor Gioan Fugger barone di Kirchberg et Weissenhorn). The “illustrious signor” in question was the art-loving Johann Fugger, a member of the old Fugger bankers’ family, living in Augsburg, who in 1582 hosted the Emperor at his residence within the Imperial Parliament, in the presence of Luython and other court musicians. Yet Luython had known Johann Fugger for some time, as he himself indicated in the dedication as follows: “for many favours in various times, often done to my father and myself...” (per le molte gratie fatte in diversi tempi tanto a mio padre che a me stesso...). The collection comprises 11 madrigals for five voices. Overall, all the texts could be defined as lyrical, melancholic even, with love themes. Standing out among them is the sixth, markedly panegyric madrigal *Sacro Monte*, which also divides the collection’s content into two main groups. The first, madrigals 1 to 5, comes across as rather sad, here and there tragic. Madrigals 7 to 11 too meet the contemporary requirements for melancholic atmosphere, yet sound

far more positive, with madrigals 7 and 8 (*Volgendo gli occhi* and *Due rose fresche*) in particular being imbued with a joyous strain. The overall set-up of the lyrics in Luython’s collection reflects the period penchant for contradictions, which was mainly related to the interest in Antiquity and the pursuit of theoretical deliberations about the Ancient opinions of the world, art and thinking. The lyrics within Luython’s collection of madrigals form symmetrically arranged pairs of moods. The first and the final madrigals of both halves of the collection constitute pairs in a similar vein, whereas the other texts represent pairs of contrasting moods.

All the set texts are in Italian, which is typical for the madrigal as an Italian musical genre. With the exception of *Sacro Monte*, written by an anonymous author (with Luython himself being considered its creator), they are sonnets by Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch), whose poems were frequently set to music throughout the 16th century. Luython’s collection of madrigals contains texts that inspired composers of various provenience and hailing from different times. Some of Petrarch’s sonnets were extremely popular and often set to music (e.g. *Erano i capelli d’oro a l’aura sparsi*), while others scarcely appeared in the 16th-century music collections (e.g. *Volgendo gli occhi al mio nuovo colore*).

A skilful composer, Carl Luython made full use of all the compositional techniques available at the time, which particularly manifested itself in his using all chromatic notes within *musica ficta* and when working with dissonant chords. For instance, he often resolved dissonance into another dissonance. He amply applied chromaticism, both within single melodic line and between the voices. Accordingly, Luython took into consideration not only the horizontal line but also the vertical harmonic situation, while his musical imagination may have been influenced by his long-time tenure as an organist. All the madrigals were composed applying the principle of alternation of polyphonic and homophonic sections, and contrastive changes between declamatorily and melismatically sung texts.

Selectissimarum sacrarum cantionum (...) fasciculus primus

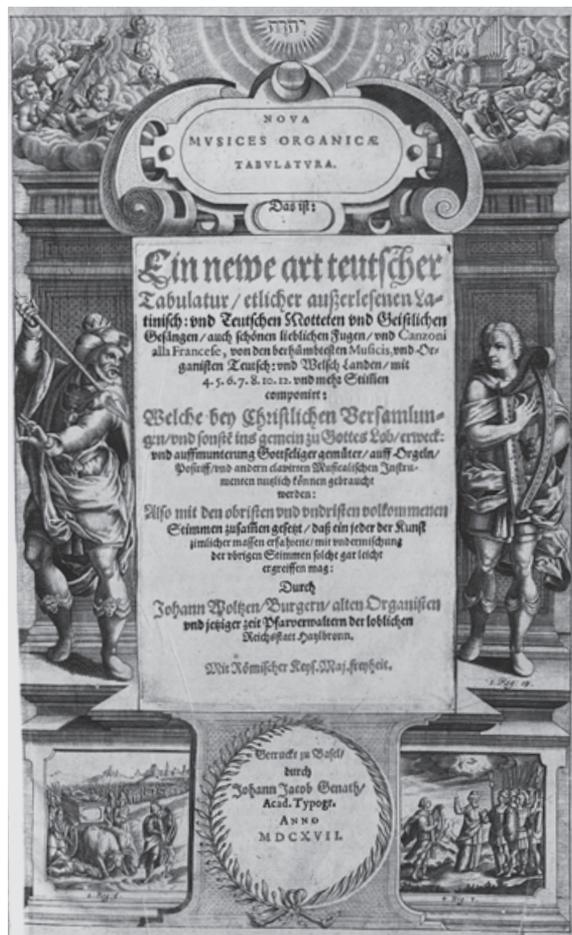
In 1603, the Prague typographer Jiří Nigrin published Luython’s collection bearing the title *Selectissimarum sacrarum cantionum (...) fasciculus primus*. At the time, *sacrae cantiones* (sacred songs) was one of the common terms used to denominate church motets. The other part of the name, *fasciculus primus*, indicates that it was the first (yet also the only) collection of this type

Luython had had published. To all appearances, he included in the volume the bulk of his sacred motets, which he wrote during his time serving at the Imperial court. The collection is made up of 29 motets for six voices, thus being one of his most extensive publications.

The dedication of Luython's *Selectissimarum sacrarum cantionum* (...) *fasciculus primus* can serve to illustrate the contacts of Rudolf II's Kapelle with the spiritual and humanistic milieu of Prague. The collection was inscribed to Jiří Barthold of Breitenberg, an employee of the General Vicariate of the Prague Archiepiscopate, who was also a prolific writer and poet. Luython was evidently in touch with Barthold long before the collection was published, as his works also include a 1587 print bearing the title *Popularis anni jubilus*, which contains music set to Barthold's texts based on popular traditional subjects.

Of a humanistic nature too are the lyrics of the collection *Selectissimarum sacrarum cantionum* (...) *fasciculus primus*. The texts set to music by Luython include those on the Marian theme, glorifying saints, as well as texts pertaining to the fluctuating holidays of the ecclesiastic year. Just a small minority of the lyrics were evidently taken over from liturgical books without any modifications. Others start with a passage that is generally known and used in the liturgy, yet upon closer inspection we can observe that these texts are either consistently compiled from several fragments originally forming a part of various segments of daily prayers or supplemented with newly composed commentaries. Serving as examples in this respect are the Marian antiphon of the first motet, *Regina caeli laetare*, furnished with a commentary, or the lyrics to *Sancte Paule Apostole*, celebrating Saint Paul, put together from a number of liturgical texts. Many of the texts set by Luython were newly composed by unknown creators. Owing to their high quality and the poetic forms applied, for instance, Sapphic stanzas and elegiac distichs, they were most likely skilful humanistic poets.

The texts are essential for the general stylistic characteristics of Luython's motets, as their form and meaning reflect in the structuring and overall sound of the music. In the panegyric motets, for instance, *Bellum insigne*, describing Saint Michael the Archangel's slaying the evil dragon, Luython employed a modern homophonic style, underlining important phrases by means of rhetorical figures and enlivening them by triple metre. On the other hand, he opted for a rather more conservative, more serious compositional style for the penitential motet *Domine Jesu Christe*, mainly characterised by polyphony, long note values and minor-sounding harmony.



The title page of the collection *Nova musices organicae tabulatura*, Basel, 1617, containing Carl Luython's *Fuga suavissima*

Luython's Sacrae cantiones in Bohemia and beyond

Luython's compositional prowess is not only manifested in his accomplished settings of Petrarch's sonnets in the madrigals and of Latin sacred texts in the motets. A few of his pieces appeared in various manuscripts and music anthologies, which bears witness to Luython's works being popular both at the time of his contemporaries and in the eras of the next generations. As for the collection *Selectissimarum sacrarum cantionum* (...) *fasciculus primus*, a copy of the motet *Bellum insigne* was included in the partbooks of the literary brotherhood in Rokycany, Bohemia. His motet *Gloria laus et honor*, a setting of a liturgical text for the Palm Sunday procession, was incorporated into the renowned German anthology *Promptuarium musicum*, whose repertoire served to inspire many a transalpine Baroque composer.

Franz Sale

(ca. 1540 – Prague, 15 July 1599)

Deditissimus Caesareus Musicus

Petr Daněk

In the spring of 1591, the singer and composer Franz (Franciscus, François) Sale (Sales, Salec, Saletz) arrived in Prague. Approximately 50 years of age, he was undoubtedly a mature man with ample musical and personal experience gained during his travels across Europe. He came to the Habsburg capital with the intention to obtain the post of vocalist in the famous Rudolfine ensemble, headed by Philippus de Monte. And he did not make the trip in vain, as in all likelihood he had been promised the job of tenor in advance. For the rest of his life, which he spent in Prague, he held the prestigious title Musicus Caesareus.

From Namur to Prague

Sale hailed from Namur, today's Belgium, where he was born circa 1550. When it comes to his life and work prior to his arrival in Prague, there is only fragmental archival information or references, mostly mentioned by himself in the verbose prefaces to his music prints. We can assume that he grew up and obtained musical training in his native region, which he evidently left for religious reasons, moving to Central Europe. On repeated occasions, in 1579–80, he applied for, yet failed to win, a post in the court ensemble in Stuttgart, where his brother, Nikolaus Sale (ca. 1550 – 5 April 1606), served. By contrast, he succeeded at the courts in Hechingen and Munich, as documented in the 1580 records, yet he did not stay for long. On 1 November 1580, he assumed the post of singer in Innsbruck, where he remained for seven years. In 1587, he was named Kapellmeister of a small ensemble at the Royal Convent in the Habsburg residential town of Hall in Tirol for ladies from aristocratic families. Instrumental in Sale's being appointed to this post was a commendatory letter written by Ferdinand of Tyrol (1529–1595), dated 13 April 1587 and addressed to his sister, Archduchess Magdalena (1532–1590), who headed the convent for noblewomen. As of 1 May 1591, he is recorded as a singer of the Imperial ensemble in Prague, where he stayed up until his death, on 15 July 1599.

Life in Prague

The final eight years of his life Sale spent in Prague were truly prolific. In addition to being a tenor



The title page of Franz Sale's volume *Sacrarum cantionum*, printed by Jiří Nigrin, Prague, 1593

with the indisputably brilliant ensemble, he also did his best to have the maximum of his own pieces published. Between 1593 and 1598, the Prague typographer Jiří Nigrin issued eight prints of Sale's polyphonic compositions. Nigrin was an ideal partner, as he possessed a sufficient amount of music printing blocks and was the only Czech printer to have experience with publishing extensive music collections. What is more, his prints were also sold abroad. By the time of releasing Sale's first compilation, Nigrin had (besides minor music prints) published music by a number of distinguished Rudolfine Prague composers, primarily those serving at the court, including Mateo Flecha, Jacob Kerl, Charles Luython, Giovanni Battista Pinellas, Stefan Felis, Johannes Knöfel, Tiburtio Massaino and Johannes Nucio. Nigrin gained great experience in connection with the implementation of the generously conceived set of prints of music by Jacobus Handl Gallus in the 1580s (for more about Nigrin, see CMQ 2015/3).

Franz Sale's music printed in Prague

Prior to arriving in Prague, Sale had only had a single print of his pieces issued. In 1589, the Munich-based typographer Adam Berg published a collection of Sale's masses, *Patrocinium musices*. The first of the numerous Prague prints of Sale's music was the bulky 1593 volume of motets for five to six voices, titled *Sacrarum cantionum (...) liber primus*. The publication, dated in Prague the final day of 1592, is dedicated to the chief chamberlain Wolfgang Rumpf. The second collection of Sale's music, dated a year later (Datum Pragae pridie Calendas Ianuarias: A.D. M.D.XCIII), contains the first

section of a polyphonic version of a part of the Proper of the Mass (Introitus, Alleluia and Communio) for holidays of the entire ecclesiastical year and is dedicated to Stanislav Pavlovský, the Archbishop of Olomouc, and again scored for five or six voices. Polyphonic music for the Proper of the Mass was also included in Sale's next two collections published in Prague: *Tripertiti operis Officiorum Missalium (...) liber primus*, dedicated to Sigismund III of Poland and dated 4 November 1595, and *Officiorum Missalium (...) liber tertius & ultimus*, also issued in 1596 and containing no dedication.

Following a year in which no Sale music was printed, 1598 saw numerous publications of his pieces. In January (di Praga il di 28. Gennaro 1598), a collection of Sale's Italian canzonettas for three voices was printed, revealing his yielding to the then fashionable taste and affection for Italy (Nigrin's name is Italianised, stated as "Giorgio Negrino") and dedicated to Albert Fürstenberg. In 1598, Sale again made use of his contacts in Munich for printing his motet and mass *Exultandi tempus est*, followed by a publication in Prague of *Dialogismus (...) de amore Christi*, dedicated to the Wrocław city council, a piece for eight voices rather atypical with regard to Sale's other works, not only owing to its configuration and its being intended for two choruses, but also the selection of the text. Penned by the humanistic poet Johannes Linckius, it is conceived as a conversation between the Church, Christ and angels. Also published in 1598 was Sale's recently discovered set of motets titled *Salutationes ad B.V. Mariae*. With respect to its content, pertaining to Sale's tenure in Bohemia was his final known collection printed in that year, *Oratio ad Sanctam B. V. Mariam, Winislaum, Adalbertum, Vitum, Sigismundum, Procopium, Stephanum, regnorum Hungariae et Bohemiae patrones* for six voices, dedicated to, among others, Czech saints.

Composer of His Imperial Grace

In addition to choosing the then quite uncommon theme of Czech saints in the aforementioned collection, Sale also demonstrated his affinity to Bohemia by numerous personal activities. Although to date these have been documented rather randomly, as more systematic research in archives is yet to be carried out, it is evident that he tried to supplement his wage as a court singer with other sources of income, by means of, for instance, sending his music prints to wealthy dignitaries and city councils in Bohemia, as well as in neighbouring countries. One of the preserved documents bearing witness to Sale's having done so is a letter he wrote

in July 1593 to the town council in Jihlava, attached to the assignment of the collection of motets *Sacrarum cantionum*, published in that year and sent in the hope for its meeting with a positive response and earning him some money. At the same time, he also sent the work to Cheb, where it was received favourably, yet Sale was only paid the promised sum following a reminder. Documenting the fact that his activity led to the desired response is a letter from the Archbishop's Office in Olomouc, dated 11 January 1594, which confirms that the composer was granted 12 ducats for the dedication of the print *Officiorum Missalium (...) liber secundus*. A similar proof of respect can be found in the Rožmberk family archives. A relatively brief and vague piece of information in this respect is provided by František Mareš's study on the Rožmberk court ensemble, which reads: "In 1592, [Vilém of Rožmberk] gave František, composer of His Imperial Grace, 10 kopas; to wit, František Sale, tenor of the Imperial Kapelle in 1591-1599." The Rožmberk archival sources document another success of Sale's with the noble family, four years later, confirming that "Franciscus Sale, composer of His Imperial Grace, was granted 4 kopas [of Meissen groschen]". In the latter case, it evidently concerned the patron's response to music prints sent by Sale. The Rožmberk library contained publications of his *Sacrarum cantionum (...) liber primus* and canzonettas for three voices.

Partes Francisci de Sale on coloured paper

Even though the Rožmberk copies of Sale's works have not been preserved, some prints of his music are maintained in other archives in the Czech Republic. The alto volume of the collection *Sacrarum cantionum* is housed at the National Library in Prague, as well as at the Deanery Library in Rokycany. The soprano part of the 1596 *Officiorum Missalium* is deposited at the Hradec Králové Museum. The complete edition of *Dialogismus octo vocum de amore Christi* from 1598 is owned by the Music Department of the National Library in Prague. Until recently, the "Nigrin print of F. Sale's compositions (altus, the late 16th century)" was contained in Rudolf Hlava's collection in Semily, yet it is currently missing. None the less, prints of Sale's music were indisputably present in Bohemia in a larger amount, as documented by, for instance, the accidentally discovered list of the library of the Kutná Hora citizen and distinguished man of letters **Adam Hněvusický**, dating from 25 February 1619, which among numerous music scores contained the "Introiti Francisci Sale printed for 6 Vocum", and the inventory of the monastery in Zlatá Koruna,

containing a note referring to the occurrence of “6 vocum, partes Francisci de Sale in red leather: 6 vocum, partes by the same composer on coloured paper” and “Oratio Francisci de Sale, not bound, in three pieces”.

Ex libris Francisci Sale

A remarkable mention of Sale’s presence in Bohemia is included in Gottfried Johann Dlabacz’s 1815 *Künstler-Lexikon*. Under the entry “Sale, Franz”, the author states that the Strahov Library has in its possession the print *F. Nausea, Episcopi Viennensis Homiliarum Epitome*, dating from 1549, at the beginning of which there is the autograph inscription “Ex libris Francisci Sale Caes. Mtis. Musici” and elsewhere it contains a similar piece of information, “Emptus à Francisco Sale Caes. Mai. Musico”. A fragmentary, yet intriguing reference to his personal contacts is mentioned by Emilian Trola in his study on the Prague Jesuits’ relationship to music, which reads that according to the Klementinum College diary on 1 July 1597 the Imperial tenor “Sahly” invited the Jesuit priests to lunch.

Organista cum suis cantoribus

During his tenure in Prague, Sale strove to have his oeuvre published in its relative entirety. This endeavour of his is reminiscent of that of Jacobus Handl Gallus, who too spent the end of his days in the city, primarily focusing on the systematic publication of his own compositions. With the exception of the two prints mentioned above, Sale’s works were issued at the agile Nigrin’s printing office. In comparison with such late-Renaissance authorities as Orlando di Lasso and Philippus de Monte, Sale’s oeuvre is not overly extensive, yet it encompasses all the types of vocal music that were popular in Rudolfine Prague, apart from madrigals, which were quite happily substituted for by the formally simpler canzonettas. Sale is one of the numerous late 16th-century composers about whom we have available relatively copious information, which, however, is markedly incongruous and has been taken over unquestioningly in the specialist literature over the past few decades. Consequently, his significance is yet to be defined, while his name, if mentioned at all, has mostly appeared in musicological studies merely within listings of composers active during a certain era or in a certain location. Our opinion is that his music has been neglected undeservedly, and particularly owing to the lack of awareness of his works. The aspiration for publishing his pieces dates back almost 150 years, and the knowledge of his life remains fragmentary. Sale’s style was influenced by the music of Orlando di Lasso, whom he personally met during his tenure in Munich. As regards the number of parts his pieces were scored for, it depended on the selected type and genre. Sale’s motets and masses are predominantly for five or six voices, the secular canzonettas for three, the festive *Dialogismus* for eight. Exceptional is the number of *propria missae* cycles he composed. And remarkable too is that a number of prints of his works include Sale’s notes, describing the manner of performance. In the motet *Regina coeli laetare* for six voices, from the 1598 collection *Salutationes*, designated as a Dialogue for three choruses, the notes, written during the course of the piece,



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Organista cum suis cantoribus, Solus, Omnes simul cum Organo, Chorus, elucidate that the work was performed with organ accompaniment, bringing to bear a contrast between a group of soloists and the entire chorus. Even though Sale's style may have failed to attain the singularity of the great masters, his oeuvre does reveal that he was a superlative musician and proficient singer, who well knew the potentialities and beauty of the human voice.

Hans Leo Hassler Kapellmeister, Cammerorganist, Oberster Musikus und Kaiserlicher Hofdiener von Haus aus (and his brothers)

Petr Daněk

Wir wollen singn ein' Lobgesang

The story began in Jáchymov (Joachimsthal), a town in West Bohemia near the German border, where, circa 1530, one Isaak Hassler was born. His parents, professing Protestantism, hailed from Nuremberg and had moved to Bohemia in 1526. At the time, the town was experiencing a great boom in the wake of the opening of the prosperous silver mines by the Šlik family in 1520. Shortly after Isaak's birth, Jáchymov had some 18,000 inhabitants, living in more than 1,200 houses. Isaak's teachers were the priest Johann Matthesius (1504–1565), a distinguished theologian and the author of the first biography of Martin Luther, and the cantor Nikolaus Herman (1500–1561), a composer of numerous, still performed, Lutheran songs. Herman was the one who inspired Issak Hassler to become an organist and thus launch a tradition that would bring fame to his family. At the age of 24, Hassler left for Nuremberg, where he married Kunigunde Schneider, with whom he had nine children. Three sons pursued their father's professional path. Their names were Caspar, Hans Leo and Jacobus.

Caspar Hassler, einer aus den berühmsten Organisten

(17 August 1562, Nuremberg – 1618, Nuremberg)

The eldest of Isaak Hassler's sons, Caspar, remained in his native Nuremberg all his life. He was taught the organ by his father. When he was 24 years old, he became an organist at the Saint Egidien Church, yet only stayed for a year, leaving so as to assume the same post at the Saint Lawrence Church. He repeatedly travelled to Augsburg to work for

the Fugger family. On several occasions, the city council had to resolve problems relating to him and his brother Hans Leo that pertained to the lending of money at high interest. Caspar married Hester Haiden, and their son, Johann Benedikt Hassler (1594–1646), too became an organist, pursuing the family tradition. Furthermore, Caspar Hassler was an active member of a music committee and a famed organ connoisseur and builder. From among his compositions, only one piece for organ has been preserved, as have a cycle of vocal sacred works (*Sacrae symphoniae*), published in Nuremberg between 1598 and 1613. Caspar Hassler was also a typographer, printing Italian and South German music of his time.

Hans Leo Hassler, Musicus inter Germanos sua aetate summus

(baptized 26 October 1564, Nuremberg – 8 June 1612, Frankfurt)

The greatest recognition from among the family members was gained by Hans Leo. Similarly to his brothers, he too was provided with basic organ training by his father. In all likelihood, he also met the composer Leonhard Lechner, who taught at the Saint Lawrence School in Nuremberg and who was directly influenced by Orlando di Lasso. In 1584, at the age of 18, Hans Leo left for Venice so as to familiarise himself with the new Italian polychoral music and the art of madrigal. He was one of the first German composers to be inspired in many aspects by Italian musical invention. Hans Leo spent 18 months in Venice under the guidance of Andrea Gabrieli, first organist at Saint Mark's Basilica, and befriended his teacher's nephew, Giovanni Gabrieli. Quick to learn, he also brought to bear the knowledge obtained from the composer Baldassare Donato, who at the time was serving as *magister puerorum* at Saint Mark's and is known for his singular canzonettas. Hassler's music was evidently also impacted by other major contemporary Italian composers, including Cipriano de Rore, Luca Marenzio, Giovanni Gastoldi and Claudio Merulo. Most probably, Andrea Gabrieli mediated for the young artist a contact to the Fuggers, a family of prominent businessmen and bankers, in Augsburg. Notwithstanding their different religions, in 1598 Hans Leo, a Protestant, was hired by the Catholic Octavian II Fugger as a chamber organist (*Cammerorganist*). During this service, in which he stayed up until 1600, he received a high wage. His time in Augsburg played a significant role in Hans Leo's career. Owing to his immense diligence, invention and ambition, he gained fame and within a relatively short time ranked among the most

celebrated German composers of the time. He also enjoyed great respect as a practising organist and teacher. Dating from this time are several prints of his works (*Neue deutsche Gesang nach art der welschen Madrigalien und Canzonetten*, 1596, *Lustgarten neuer deutscher Gesäng, Balletti, Galliarden und Intraden*, 1601), which, imbued with unique invention, brought Italian influences into the German milieu and language. No less famous were the collections of his sacred pieces (*Cantiones sacrae*, 1591, *Missa quaternis, V. VI. et VIII. vocibus*, 1599, *Sacri concertus*, 1601, *Psalmen und Christliche Gesäng*, 1607, *Kirchengesäng: Psalmen und geistliche Lieder*, 1608). Hans Leo's artistry even intrigued the Imperial court in Prague, and Rudolf II duly engaged him in his services. It is, however, highly likely that Hassler's contacts with Prague, the court, the Emperor and other aristocrats were of a very prosaic nature, as he was a dexterous, successful and sought-after money-lender, and well as a trader in silver and other precious metals. Yet there is no doubt that Rudolf II was also impressed by his skill in building playing machines. A passionate collector, the Emperor procured at least one mechanical musical instrument for his *Kunstkammer* from Hassler's workshop. By the way, the building of automatophones and their authorship gave rise to a long-running legal dispute in Augsburg in which Hans Leo was embroiled and which, in 1602, also involved the Imperial Office. The expenditure folder of the Prague court's ledger mentions Hans Leo as a "Hofdiener on 2 horses, von Haus aus" (a court servant without a precise rank, who did not have to be constantly present at the court and was entrusted with special tasks), in 1605, 1609 and 1611. Nonetheless, the amount recorded in 1609 is so high that it must have been paid for a longer period or for important services for the court or the Emperor himself. In 1595, Rudolf honoured Hans Leo and his brothers by ennobling them. During the course of his life, Hassler was a party to several lawsuits, in which his colleague musicians appeared as witnesses, often testifying against him (Gregor Aichinger). Hans Leo always remained in contact with his native Nuremberg. In the wake of the death of Octavian II Fugger, he was briefly head of the Augsburg city buglers, yet in 1601 he assumed the post of *Oberster Musikus* in Nuremberg. At the time, his popularity reached its apex, with his works being published, copied, performed, used as exercises in composition lessons and, naturally, imitated, in line with the spirit of the period's stylistic universalism. On 1 March 1605, at the age of 41, Hans Leo married Cordula Klaus, the daughter of a merchant in Ulm. By then his fame was so great that the newly-weds

received presents from luminaries throughout Central Europe, including the Emperor himself. In 1608, he settled down in Ulm for good and became a regular citizen with all the attendant rights and duties. To all appearances, he intended to devote to business rather than music. Nevertheless, owing to the fecklessness of the Imperial Office, which failed to settle his claims, he got into financial difficulties. Therefore, in 1608, he accepted the post of chamber organist in the services of Christian III, Elector of Saxony, in Dresden. After the death of his master, in 1611, Hans Leo began serving his successor, Johann Georg I, yet soon, on 8 June 1612, he died in Frankfurt en route to the coronation of the new Emperor, Matthias of Habsburg, with the most likely reasons being exhaustion and tuberculosis-related problems.

Jacobus, Cappelmaister und Organist

(18 December 1569, Nuremberg - summer of 1622, Cheb)

The youngest of the Hassler brothers, Jacobus, received a musical training in his adolescence similar to that of Hans Leo. It is documented that in 1585 he served as a city bugler in Augsburg, yet he was obviously more inclined to pursuing a career as an organist and composer. In 1591, following in his brother's footsteps, he made an educational trip to Italy (paid for by Augsburg's Fugger family), where he became a pupil of Giovanni Gabrieli. After returning to Germany, Jacobus assumed the post of Kapellmeister and organist in the services of Eitel-Friedrich IV, Duke of Hohenzollern. On several occasions, he fell into troubles that had to be resolved at court. Unlike Hans Leo, however, in his case they were mainly disputes about paternity. In 1596, he had an extramarital son Philipp Jacob, who was ultimately brought up by the Prague Jesuits. In 1601, he moved to Prague to become a chamber organist at the Imperial court. Jacobus's career was enhanced by the fame of Hans Leo and the nobility he and his brothers were granted by Rudolf II six years previously. The annual wage he received, as well as the benefits he could enjoy, including free accommodation, clothing and regular boarding, reveals that the Prague court thought very highly of him. In all likelihood, Jacobus too was involved in trading in silver and precious metals, as well as the money-lending operation run by his brother. Non-musical purposes too were behind the trips Jacobus was sent on by the influential Imperial butler Philipp Lang of Langenfels. He received money from the Imperial Office continuously from 1603 till the end of Rudolf II's rule. After

Rudolf's death, he briefly served his successor to the throne, Matthias, yet soon, most probably owing to health problems, or also because he wanted to continue to trade in metals, he moved to Cheb, where he died at the age of 43.

During his lifetime, Jacobus had published in Nuremberg, in 1600, the *Collection of Madrigals for Seven Voices*, dedicated to Christoph Fugger, a year later the *Magnificat octo tonorum*, dedicated to his patron in Hechingen, and two of his motets were issued within the collective volumes *Rosetum Marianum* and *Reliquiae sacrorum concertum*. A small amount of his singular pieces for organ have been preserved as autographs only.

Contrapuncti compositi

The title of the present article also represents an assessment of the three Hassler brothers' significance for the history of music. All of them were prominent German and Central European musicians, but Hans

Leo clearly stood out among them as an organist and, above all, composer, as well as an organ and automatic music machine builder, Kapellmeister, director of ensembles and music event organiser. His greatest contributions included the import and application of a new Italian compositional style in German music at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries, primarily as regards the employment of polychoralism in sacred music and madrigals, and the overall conception of secular pieces. In his works, he also deepened the difference between the vocal and instrumental styles, as is evident in his organ ricercars, canzonas, toccatas and dance compositions. Highly important for the history of Protestant music were his polyphonic vocal works.

(to be completed in the next issue)

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Antonín Dvořák

String Quartets Nos. 10 & 13

Bennewitz Quartet (Jakub Fišer, Štěpán Ježek - violins, Jiří Pinkas - viola, Štěpán Doležal - cello).

Text: German, English. Recorded: Hans-Rosbaud-Studio Baden-Baden, Apr. 2014. Released: 2015. TT: 71.20. DDD. 1 CD SWR Music CD 93.340.

In two years' time, the still young **Bennewitz Quartet**, currently made up of **Jakub Fišer, Štěpán Ježek, Jiří Pinkas** and **Štěpán Doležal**, will have been performing on concert stages for a full two decades. More frequently abroad than at home, as has been customary for generations of Czech quartets. With the exception of the 2011 Supraphon recital album made with the clarinetist Ludmila Peterková, the Czech listeners interested in the Bennewitz Quartet's commercial recordings must seek out foreign releases, such as the CD of Smetana works (Coviello Classics, 2009) and the disc featuring Janáček's music and Bartók's fourth string quartet (Coviello Classics, 2007). Deserved attention was aroused back in 2012 by the ensemble's very first Dvořák project (Hänssler Classics 98.641), a double album containing the vocal and instrumental *Cypresses*, B 11 & 152 (1865/1887), supplemented with six modern adaptations of the pieces that were not arranged by Dvořák himself. Two years later, the Bennewitz Quartet have made a new studio recording of Dvořák music, the *String Quartet in E flat major* (1879) and *String Quartet in G major* (1896), which are divided by 17 prolific years, during which the composer wrote a round hundred other works, yet are related owing to their sensuous sound and high emotionality, especially when compared to his more objective Brahms/Beethoven *Quartets Nos. 9 and 11*, in D minor and C major, respectively, or

the minimalist *American Quartet* in F major and the modernist 1896 *Quartet No. 14* in A major (1896), Dvořák's final piece of this type.

As *Quartets Nos. 10 and 13* have seldom been featured together, I relished this interesting dramaturgical conception when looking at the CD's sleeve alone. The album's qualities are underlined by an exemplary accompanying text, which in terms of its informative value and lucidity surpasses the notes of many a Czech release. Yet, naturally, the most valuable facet is the recording itself, demonstratively enhancing the current interest in Dvořák's quartet works, which has also been reflected in the Zemlinsky Quartet's recently rounded off project of the complete Dvořák quartets (Praga Digitals), and the Vogler Quartet's currently ongoing project (CPO). Whereas the Smetana album drew attention to the Bennewitz Quartet as an exciting young ensemble, the new Dvořák CD flows at circumspect tempos, breathes with nuanced dynamics and highlights many a detail in the middle parts and counterparts. In both of the quartets – and rightfully so – the ensemble accentuate their symphonic ambitions, lyrical charge and melancholically elegiac standstills.

There are precious few recordings out there on which the first movement of *Quartet No. 10* is delivered at such a generous tempo (11:28) and with such fine details. It is as though you were browsing through an old photo album, afraid to turn the pages so they do not fall apart under your hands. Yet Dvořák's score definitely does not fall apart in the Bennewitz Quartet's hands; the musicians also toy with the delicate agogic values in the piece's middle movements, before betaking themselves to the vivacity of the "Slavonic" finale. Their account of Dvořák's final quartet is fabulous indeed: sonically juicy, with the dynamics finely nuanced, imbued with a melancholic tinge in the colours of Indian summer. Their take on the second movement and the second theme of the first in particular bears witness to the sheer maturity of the Bennewitz Quartet, who, unlike

the spontaneous Pavel Haas Quartet (Supraphon, 2010), have not betrayed their lyrical approach, remaining faithful to it when delivering as complex and instrumentally ambitious a work as this masterpiece of Dvořák's.

Perhaps only the Prague Quartet (Deutsche Grammophon / Supraphon, 1973) and the Panocha Quartet (Supraphon, 1984) have similarly succeeded in balancing all the tones of Dvořák's *String Quartet No. 13* in G major, if disregarding the recent, almost agogically old-wordly, recording made by the Zemlinsky Quartet (Praga Digitals 2012), or the virtuoso account on the album of the Artemis Quartet (Virgin Classics, 2003). And music lovers will definitely be looking forward to the new Dvořák recordings to be made by the Bennewitz Quartet. Or at least to listening to their present album again.

Martin Jemelka

Jan Dismas Zelenka

Italian Arias

**Hana Blažíková - soprano,
Markéta Cukrová - mezzo-soprano,
Tomáš Šelc - bass baritone,
Ensemble Tourbillon,**

Petr Wagner - Artistic Director.

Text: English, German, French.

Recorded: 2015. Released: 2016.

TT: 69:00. DDD.

1 CD Accent ACC 24306.

Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679–1745) is one of the Czech music figures whose lives have been the subject of legends and myths. His confirmation name, Dismas, has given rise to speculation that he had committed something so socially unacceptable that, in order to repent of his misdemeanour, he had to assume the name of one of the villains

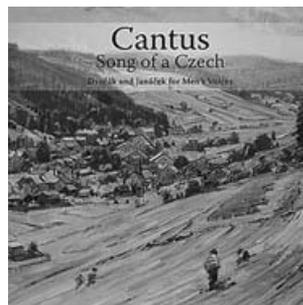
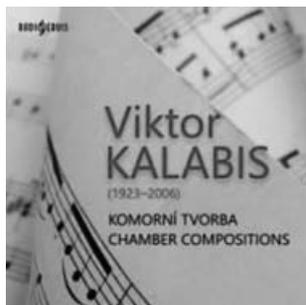


crucified alongside Christ. And the fact that he had failed to obtain the post of Kapellmeister at the Dresden court has been deemed to have resulted in his becoming embittered at the world... Both, however, are pure speculations. In connection with his name, some have also speculated as to the composer's possible homosexuality, yet this has never been confirmed. The explanation of Zelenka's position is more prosaic. The post of Kapellmeister in Dresden was bound to composing operas for the court theatre. The Elector of Saxony employed several opera composers, with the most famous of them being Johann Adolf Hasse, celebrated throughout Europe. Zelenka was engaged and highly valued in Dresden as a Hofkomponist (court composer) and Kirchenkompositeur (church composer, responsible for the music performances at the local Catholic chapel), and he did not usually devote to music drama. The exceptions in this respect were the extensive congratulatory 1737 serenata *Il Diamante*, composed for the wedding of George Ignatius Lubomirski, Prince of Poland, and Baroness Johanna von Stein, which took place at the Dresden court, and eight secular arias dating from 1733, the final of which, *Son da piu venti*, was set to the lyrics of the noted poet Apostolus Zen, taken over from the libretto to the opera *Ormsid* (to date, no other texts have been identified). Zelenka may have intended these arias as a supplement to one of his several petitions in which he asked to be named court Kapellmeister. His striving for being conferred this status was indisputably justified, as during the more than three decades he served in Dresden he stood in for two court Kapellmeisters over the long term. Zelenka performed the duties on behalf of Johann David Heinichen when he was ill, up until his death in 1729; while he stood in for Johann Adolf Hasse, who entered the services of the Dresden court in 1732, throughout his frequent absences, sometimes lasting several years. Well, today we can only conjecture as to why he

was not appointed court Kapellmeister and why he was afforded so few opportunities to present himself as a secular composer. *Il diamante* and *Alcune Arie Cavate dalle diverse Opere, poste in Musica* bear witness to Zelenka's having been capable of writing brilliant secular vocal music for Dresden (after all, he had proved his mastery in this respect back in his work *Sub olea pacis*, which in 1723 was performed to mark the coronation in Prague of Emperor Charles VI as King of Bohemia). The one and only aspect of Zelenka's secular arias that can be found fault with is that, compared to the common period production, they were too long and extremely difficult to perform. Yet this also applies to Zelenka's works in general – his sacred pieces too were criticised for being overly lengthy (at the time, just like opera, church music was considered a utility matter). That which in today's audience gives rise to admiration for Zelenka's originality did not necessarily have to comply with the taste of the Elector of Saxony, who probably expected a secular music composer to supply him with stylistically refined, yet also lightened creations, which would serve to entertain, not provide food for thought (after all, that is what the Catholic Royal Chapel in Dresden was for). Moreover, the Elector wished to listen to brief pieces (a mass was not supposed to last more than 45 minutes). The Saxon Protestants ignored the court music performances entirely – although they tolerated the Electors' conversion to Catholicism, which was a condition they had to meet so as to be able to ascend the Polish throne, they were not willing to endure the musical accompaniment of the divine services of a religion totally alien to them. The present CD Jan Dismas Zelenka: Italian Arias (ZWV 176) has filled the hitherto gap in recordings of his music, which have experienced a great blossoming primarily owing to Czech ensembles focusing on his sacred works. The finest contemporary Czech viola da gamba player, **Petr Wagner**, has recorded the album of Zelenka's

Alcune arie with his **Ensemble Tourbillon**, made up of **Lenka Torgersen** and **Lubica Habart** (violins), **Andreas Torgersen** (viola), **Filip Dvořák** (harpsichord) and **Přemysl Vacek** (archlute), and three vocal soloists – the soprano **Hana Blažiková**, the mezzo-soprano **Markéta Čukrová** and the young Slovak bass baritone **Tomáš Šelc**. As has become usual with foreign CDs, the album's booklet does not give any information about the artists – should the listeners be interested, they must find it on the internet. The text itself, written with erudition by Bernhard Blattmann, is exhaustive enough, also dealing with Zelenka's failed attempts at gaining the post of Kapellmeister. The booklet notes are provided in English, French and German, while the lyrics of the arias are in the original Italian and translated into English, French and German. The album's artistic standard, though, is naturally the most important aspect – and it is very high indeed, with the singers possessing a great sense for detailed expression of the lyrics' content. The recording's technical quality is good too. It can be assumed that in the Czech Republic (and elsewhere too) there are numerous listeners who have been systematically gathering albums of Zelenka's music, and this one would certainly adorn any collection. The exceptional artistic accomplishment of Petr Wagner, Ensemble Tourbillon and their three superlative guest soloists should be paid attention to by everyone who is interested in Zelenka's oeuvre: the CD bears witness to the composer's versatility and the sheer breadth of his talent, providing information essential for better comprehension of his personality and artistry.

Michaela Freemanová



Viktor Kalabis

Chamber Compositions

Ondřej Lébr - violin, **Lukáš Polák** - cello, **Miroslav Sekera** - piano, **Jana Ludvíčková** - violin, **Monika Knoblochová** - harpsichord.

Text: Czech, English. Recorded: Martínek studio, Prague, 2011 and 2012. Released: 2015. TT: 71:16. DDD. 1 CD Radioservis CRO717-2.

The composer, radio music programmer and musicologist Viktor Kalabis was one of the most distinguished Czech music figures of the 20th century. The present album features six of his chamber pieces. Four tracks are performed by the members of the **Kalabis Trio** – **Ondřej Lébr** (violin), **Lukáš Polák** (cello) and **Miroslav Sekera** (piano) – who were joined by the violinist **Jana Ludvíčková** and the harpsichordist **Monika Knoblochová** in delivering another two compositions. The CD opens with the 1987 *Duettinos for Violin and Cello*, Op. 67, a piece possessing all the attributes characteristic of Kalabis's singular musical idiom. The energetic and poignant composition is delivered with technical accuracy and agogic forcibility, revealing the courage to make use of the extreme dynamic range. The following *Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano*, Op. 39, written in 1974, and the *Capriccio for Two Violins and Piano*, Op. 85, completed in 1998 (performed by Lébr, Sekera and Ludvíčková), can be deemed the album's apices. The two enchanting pieces of beautiful music are splendidly interpreted with profound understanding, with the violinist and cellist confirming their mastery, and the pianist Sekera dazzling in both compositions with a lovely tone, glittering in the top registers and blustering in a cultivated manner in the lower octaves. In the *Capriccio for Two Violins and Piano*, Ludvíčková is an

equal partner to Léber. The two works are imbued with an unceasing tension, which all the players have succeeded in bringing to bear with maximum intensity. Kalabis's music requires not only high technical skills, but also the performers' engagement and a certain type of creative input, musical imagination, which, in my opinion, is necessary for the revival of works composed relatively recently, works yet to have become generally known. And these requirements are met with aplomb by all the musicians who joined forces to record this CD. The fourth piece on the album is the *Sonata for Violin and Harpsichord*, Op. 28, composed in 1967 for Josef Suk and Zuzana Růžičková, Kalabis's wife. The violinist Ondřej Lébr shows just how at home he is in Kalabis's music, while the superlative performance given by the harpsichordist Monika Knoblochová serves as yet more proof of the CD's top-notch quality. The "studio tribute" to Viktor Kalabis is rounded off by two works for solo cello: the *Three Monologues for Cello*, Op. 83 (1996), and the *Rondo drammatico per violoncello sollo*, Op. 86, created as a compulsory piece for the competition within the Prague Spring 1998 international festival. They represented an alluring challenge for Lukáš Polák, who, to my taste, occasionally applies an overly elliptical vibrato, yet has succeeded in presenting them, the *Rondo drammatico* in particular, so forcibly and engrossingly that I have not the slightest doubt as to his great artistry. In conclusion, I would like to praise Vít Roubíček, who in his booklet notes provides analysis of the individual compositions and all the essential information pertaining to the music and Kalabis himself, with his comprehensive text being a prime example of an efficient processing of musicological data for this purpose.

Irena Černíčková

Cantus

Song of a Czech Dvořák and Janáček for Men's Voices

Cantus male choir,
Timothy Cheek, Sonja Kaye
Thompson - piano four hands.

Text: English, Czech. Recorded: July 2013, Concert Hall at Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota, USA. Released: 2013. TT: 75:05. DDD. 1 CD Cantus CTS-1213.

The all-male choir **Cantus**, founded in 1998 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is made up of a mere nine members, performs without a conductor and, in addition to giving frequent concerts, pursues education activities. Its repertoire is diversified in terms of style and genre, which reflects in the choir's concert programmes. In 2009, Cantus received the prestigious Chorus America Margaret Hillis Award; two years later, its work with students earned it the Chorus America Education Outreach Award. In the 2010/11 season, the choir was selected as the ensemble-in-residence of Minnesota Public Radio. Given that at the present time Cantus is considered to be one of the US's finest male choirs, it is a delight to discover that its almost 20-CD discography includes one featuring Antonín Dvořák's and Leoš Janáček's works for men's voices. The album contains recordings of Dvořák's *Choral Songs for Male Voices, B 66*; *Song of a Czech, B 73*; *Three Male Choruses with Piano, Op. 43, B 76* (*From a Bouquet of Slavonic Folksongs*); and *Five Male Choruses, Op. 27, B 87*; and Janáček's *Veni, Sancte Spiritus, JW III/13*; *Four Male Choruses, JW IV/17*; *Ave Maria, JW IV/16*; *Three Male Choruses, JW IV/19*; and *True Love, JW IV/8*. All the pieces are "a capella" apart from the Dvořák cycle



From a *Bouquet of Slavonic Folksongs*, which is accompanied by piano four hands. Cantus has a splendidly homogenous sound, evincing itself from the very first chords of the opening track, Janáček's *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* – perfectly tonally balanced, rich and beautifully soft, with the singers resourcefully working with the agogics and the dynamic structure of the musical phrases (enthraling decrescendos). What is more, their Czech pronunciation is excellent, refined by **Timothy Cheek**, one of the most respected American specialists in this field, who, together with **Sonja Kaye Thompson**, also provided the piano accompaniment in Dvořák's cycle *From a Bouquet of Slavonic Folksongs*. Commensurate to the recording's quality is the quality of the CD booklet, containing expert notes written by David R. Beveridge and the lyrics of all the pieces, furnished with English translations.

Věroslav Němec

**Antonín Dvořák
Cello Concerto in B minor,
Op. 104, B. 191**

**Édouard Lalo
Cello Concerto in D minor**

**Johannes Moser – cello,
PKF – Prague Philharmonia,
Jan Fišer – concert master,
Jakub Hrůša – conductor.**

Text: English, German. Recorded: Jan. 2015 Fórum Karlín, Prague.
Released: 2015. TT: 65:33.
1 SACD PTC 5186 488

**Antonín Dvořák
Cello Concerto in B minor,
Op. 104, B. 191, & Piano Trio
No. 4 in E minor, Dumky, Op. 90,
B. 166**

**Sebastian Klinger – cello, Deutsche
Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken-
Kaiserslautern, Simon Gaudenz –
conductor, Lisa Batiashvili – violin,
Milana Chernyavskaya – piano.**

Text: English, German.
Recorded: Oct. 2014, Sendesaal
des Saarländisches Rundfunks,
Saarbrücken (Op. 104) and July 2014,
Bayerischer Rundfunk, Studio 2,
Munich (Op. 90).

Released: 2015. TT: 72:04.
1 CD Oehms Classics OC 1828

The two reviewed CDs directly invite comparison. Recorded within a few months of each other, they capture the mastery of two peers of German origin and globetrotters, **Sebastian Klinger** (b. 1977) and **Johannes Moser** (b. 1979). The former grew up in Spain, where he began playing the cello at the age of six; the latter, with dual German-Canadian nationality, started his musical training two years later than Klinger. Whereas Klinger studied with Heinrich Schiff and Boris Pergamenschikow, and since 2014 has taught at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hamburg, Moser was a pupil of David Geringas and won the Tchaikovsky Competition (2002). Following his victory in 2001 of the Deutsches Musikwettbewerb in Berlin, in 2002, Klinger appeared in the Rising Stars series across Europe and the USA, and since 2004 he has served as first chair cellist with the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks in his native Munich. In the meantime, Moser has pursued an international career as a soloist and recorded a number of albums. Klinger plays a 1736 Camillus Camilli, Moser an instrument made in 1694 by Andrea Guarneri. Both cellists invited along for the recording young conductors: Moser opted for the Czech Republic's **Jakub Hrůša** (b. 1981), Klinger for Switzerland's

Simon Gaudenz (b. 1974). At this point, the major similarities between their CDs end, and a number of differences start. The most striking variance pertains to the number of orchestra members and their instruments. The listener has to get accustomed to the PKF – Prague Philharmonia's half-size string section, which is intriguing in the second movement and the passages in which the full strings are usually covered by woodwinds, as well as trumpets, yet it did not satisfy me in the tutti passages of the first and third movements. The slender and narrowly vibrating tone of the German radio philharmonic orchestra also affords space to sonic transparency in places that are usually dominated by the full sound of the string section. By and large, it would seem that the number of instruments does not pave the way to sonic transparency. A different approach to the instruments also characterises the sound of the wind harmony: fuller and more rounded in the case of the Prague Philharmonia, levelled and glossier in the case of the radio orchestra. The Prague Philharmonia dazzles with its account of the second movement of Dvořák's concerto and Jan Fišer's violin solo in the finale, yet, in my opinion, the recording director could have corrected the introduction to the first movement and the oboe passages in the third (5:55). In the opening of the first movement, the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken-Kaiserslautern showed off with a horn solo, whose sound quality was almost reminiscent of that of the post horn, as well as brilliant solos of woodwinds, headed by the flute in the development of the first movement. (The German orchestra currently have Dvořák in their blood, as they are recording his complete symphonies with the chief conductor, Karel Mark Chichon.) Simon Gaudenz sharply differentiates the characters of the individual movements, with the Strauss-like large orchestra heroism and mysterious performance of the first movement being ensued by objective lyricism and the final marching

rondo, leading into an intimate conversation among the cello, violins and woodwinds. On the other hand, Jakub Hrůša stakes on a compact flow of the music, Slavonic colourfulness of the wind harmony and intimate commentaries on the solo part. Yet the albums above all feature two young cellists. Klinger possesses an even tone of a pleasant tenor timbre with discreet glissandos and, as a long-time orchestra player, he has no difficulties with negotiating the communicative passages; he brilliantly manages to alternate the pastorally simple tone of the beginning of the second movement and the poignancy of the finale's conclusion. Matching up to his great predecessors, Moser possesses a self-confident and controlled expressive tone and tends to lyricise even the more heroic passages in the first movement. If I had to judge the two (SA) CDs in their entirety, I would definitely give preference to the account of Dvořák's *Dumky* (Oehms Classics) to that of Lalo's *Cello Concerto*

(PentaTone), which, in my opinion, could have been delivered with a sharper articulation and instrumental verve. And not only because it was Lisa Batiashvili's debut Dvořák recording. The *Dumky* is dominated by a self-confident dialogue between Batiashvili and Klinger, while the German pianist of Ukrainian origin Milana Chernyavska plays the role of a discreet accompanying partner. Those who would like to hear Dvořák's *Cello Concerto* as a piece par excellence, imbued with the strong personality of the soloist and reminiscing of the Czech interpretational tradition, will not be disappointed with the PentaTone CD. On the other hand, those seeking a recording reminding of the symphonic parameters of Dvořák's work and a performer capable of communicating with the other players will find that the Oehms disc meets their expectations perfectly.

Martin Jemelka

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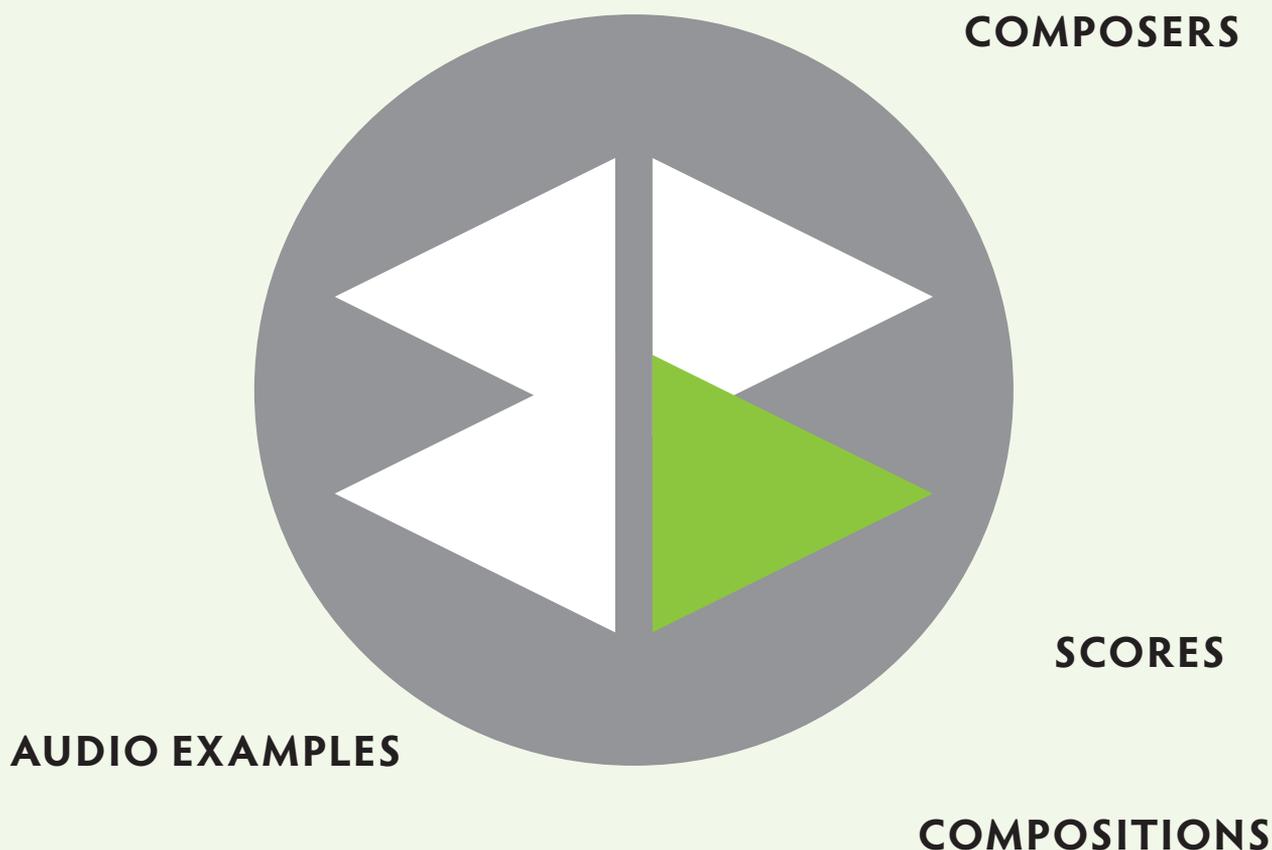
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